The Crescent Moon

Rabindranath Tagore

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TO T. STURGE MOORE

THE HOME

I PACED alone on the road across the field while the sunset was hiding its last gold like a miser.

The daylight sank deeper and deeper into the darkness, and the widowed land, whose harvest had been reaped, lay silent.

Suddenly a boy's shrill voice rose into the sky. He traversed the dark unseen, leaving the track of his song across the hush of the evening.

His village home lay there at the end of the waste land, beyond the sugar−cane field, hidden among the shadows of the banana and the slender areca palm, the cocoa−nut and the dark green jack−fruit trees.

I stopped for a moment in my lonely way under the starlight, and saw spread before me the darkened earth surrounding with her arms countless homes furnished with cradles and beds, mothers' hearts and evening lamps, and young lives glad with a gladness that knows nothing of its value for the world.

ON THE SEASHORE

ON the seashore of endless worlds children meet.

The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances.

They build their houses with sand, and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of worlds.

They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl−fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.

The sea surges up with laughter, and pale gleams the smile of the sea−beach. Death−dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle. The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea−beach.

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships are wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play. On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children.

THE SOURCE

THE sleep that flits on baby's eyes does anybody know from where it comes? Yes, there is a rumour that it has its dwelling where, in the fairy village among shadows of the forest dimly lit with glow−worms, there

hang two shy buds of enchantment. From there it comes to kiss baby's eyes.

The smile that flickers on baby's lips when he sleeps does anybody know where it was born? Yes, there is a rumour that a young pale beam of a crescent moon touched the edge of a vanishing autumn cloud, and there the smile was first born in the dream of a dew−washed morning the smile that flickers on baby's lips when he sleeps.

The sweet, soft freshness that blooms on baby's limbs does anybody know where it was hidden so long? Yes, when the mother was a young girl it lay pervading her heart in tender and silent mystery of love the sweet, soft freshness that has bloomed on baby's limbs.

BABY'S WAY

IF baby only wanted to, he could fly up to heaven this moment.

It is not for nothing that he does not leave us.

He loves to rest his head on mother's bosom, and cannot ever bear to lose sight of her.

Baby knows all manner of wise words, though few on earth can understand their meaning.

It is not for nothing that he never wants to speak.

The one thing he wants is to learn mother's words from mother's lips. That is why he looks so innocent.

Baby had a heap of gold and pearls, yet he came like a beggar on to this earth.

It is not for nothing he came in such a disguise.

This dear little naked mendicant pretends to be utterly helpless, so that he may beg for mother's wealth of love.

Baby was so free from every tie in the land of the tiny crescent moon.

It was not for nothing he gave up his freedom.

He knows that there is room for endless joy in mother's little corner of a heart, and it is sweeter far than liberty to be caught and pressed in her dear arms.

Baby never knew how to cry. He dwelt in the land of perfect bliss.

It is not for nothing he has chosen to shed tears.

Though with the smile of his dear face he draws mother's yearning heart to him, yet his little cries over tiny troubles weave the double bond of pity and love.

THE UNHEEDED PAGEANT

AH, who was it coloured that little frock, my child, and covered your sweet limbs with that little red tunic?

You have come out in the morning to play in the courtyard, tottering and tumbling as you run.

But who was it coloured that little frock, my child?

What is it makes you laugh, my little life−bud?

Mother smiles at you standing on the threshold.

She claps her hands and her bracelets jingle, and you dance with your bamboo stick in your hand like a tiny little shepherd.

But what is it makes you laugh, my little life−bud?

O beggar, what do you beg for, clinging to your mother's neck with both your hands?

O greedy heart, shall I pluck the world like a fruit from the sky to place it on your little rosy palm?

O beggar, what are you begging for?

The wind carries away in glee the tinkling of your anklet bells.

The sun smiles and watches your toilet. The sky watches over you when you sleep in your mother's arms, and the morning comes tiptoe to your bed and kisses your eyes.

The wind carries away in glee the tinkling of your anklet bells.

The fairy mistress of dreams is coming towards you, flying through the twilight sky.

The world−mother keeps her seat by you in your mother's heart.

He who plays his music to the stars is standing at your window with his flute.

And the fairy mistress of dreams is coming towards you, flying through the twilight sky.

SLEEP−STEALER

WHO stole sleep from baby's eyes? I must know.

Clasping her pitcher to her waist mother went to fetch water from the village near by.

It was noon. The children's playtime was over; the ducks in the pond were silent.

The shepherd boy lay asleep under the shadow of the *banyan* tree.

The crane stood grave and still in the swamp near the mango grove.

In the meanwhile the Sleep−stealer came and, snatching sleep from baby's eyes, flew away.

When mother came back she found baby travelling the room over on all fours.

Who stole sleep from our baby's eyes? I must know. I must find her and chain her up.

I must look into that dark cave, where, through boulders and scowling stones, trickles a tiny stream.

I must search in the drowsy shade of the *bakula* grove, where pigeons coo in their corner, and fairies' anklets tinkle in the stillness of starry nights.

In the evening I will peep into the whispering silence of the bamboo forest, where fireflies squander their light, and will ask every creature I meet, "Can anybody tell me where the Sleep−stealer lives?"

Who stole sleep from baby's eyes? I must know.

Shouldn't I give her a good lesson if I could only catch her!

I would raid her nest and see where she hoards all her stolen sleep.

I would plunder it all, and carry it home.

I would bind her two wings securely, set her on the bank of the river, and then let her play at fishing with a reed among the rushes and water−lilies.

When the marketing is over in the evening, and the village children sit in their mothers' laps, then the night birds will mockingly din her ears with:

"Whose sleep will you steal now?"

THE BEGINNING

"WHERE have I come from, where did you pick me up?" the baby asked its mother.

She answered half crying, half laughing, and clasping the baby to her breast, "You were hidden in my heart as its desire, my darling.

You were in the dolls of my childhood's games; and when with clay I made the image of my god every morning, I made and unmade you then.

You were enshrined with our household deity, in his worship I worshipped you.

In all my hopes and my loves, in my life, in the life of my mother you have lived.

In the lap of the deathless Spirit who rules our home you have been nursed for ages.

When in girlhood my heart was opening its petals, you hovered as a fragrance about it.

Your tender softness bloomed in my youthful limbs, like a glow in the sky before the sunrise.

Heaven's first darling, twin−born with the morning light, you have floated down the stream of the world's life, and at last you have stranded on my heart.

As I gaze on your face, mystery overwhelms me; you who belong to all have become mine.

For fear of losing you I hold you tight to my breast. What magic has snared the world's treasure in these slender arms of mine?"

BABY'S WORLD

I WISH I could take a quiet corner in the heart of my baby's very own world.

I know it has stars that talk to him, and a sky that stoops down to his face to amuse him with its silly clouds and rainbows.

Those who make believe to be dumb, and look as if they never could move, come creeping to his window with their stories and with trays crowded with bright toys.

I wish I could travel by the road that crosses baby's mind, and out beyond all bounds;

Where messengers run errands for no cause between the kingdoms of kings of no history;

Where Reason makes kites of her laws and flies them, and Truth sets Fact free from its fetters.

WHEN AND WHY

WHEN I bring you coloured toys, my child, I understand why there is such a play of colours on clouds, on water, and why flowers are painted in tints when I give coloured toys to you, my child.

When I sing to make you dance, I truly know why there is music in leaves, and why waves send their chorus of voices to the heart of the listening earth when I sing to make you dance.

When I bring sweet things to your greedy hands, I know why there is honey in the cup of the flower, and why fruits are secretly filled with sweet juice when I bring sweet things to your greedy hands.

When I kiss your face to make you smile, my darling, I surely understand what pleasure streams from the sky in morning light, and what delight the summer breeze brings to my body when I kiss you to make you smile.

DEFAMATION

WHY are those tears in your eyes, my child?

How horrid of them to be always scolding you for nothing?

You have stained your fingers and face with ink while writing is that why they call you dirty?

O, fie! Would they dare to call the full moon dirty because it has smudged its face with ink?

For every little trifle they blame you, my child. They are ready to find fault for nothing.

You tore your clothes while playing is that why they call you untidy?

O, fie! What would they call an autumn morning that smiles through its ragged clouds?

Take no heed of what they say to you, my child.

Take no heed of what they say to you, my child.

They make a long list of your misdeeds. Everybody knows how you love sweet things is that why they call you greedy?

O, fie! What then would they call us who love you?

THE JUDGE

SAY of him what you please, but I know my child's failings.

I do not love him because he is good, but because he is my little child.

How should you know how dear he can be when you try to weigh his merits against his faults?

When I must punish him he becomes all the more a part of my being.

When I cause his tears to come my heart weeps with him.

I alone have a right to blame and punish, for he only may chastise who loves.

PLAYTHINGS

CHILD, how happy you are sitting in the dust, playing with a broken twig all the morning.

I smile at your play with that little bit of a broken twig.

I am busy with my accounts, adding up figures by the hour.

Perhaps you glance at me and think, "What a stupid game to spoil your morning with!"

Child, I have forgotten the art of being absorbed in sticks and mud−pies.

I seek out costly playthings, and gather lumps of gold and silver.

With whatever you find you create your glad games, I spend both my time and my strength over things I never can obtain.

In my frail canoe I struggle to cross the sea of desire, and forget that I too am playing a game.

THE ASTRONOMER

I ONLY said, "When in the evening the round full moon gets entangled among the branches of that *Kadam* tree, couldn't somebody catch it?"

But dâdâ [*elder brother*] laughed at me and said, "Baby, you are the silliest child I have ever known. The moon is ever so far from us, how could anybody catch it?"

I said, "Dâdâ how foolish you are! When mother looks out of her window and smiles down at us playing, would you call her far away?"

Still said, "You are a stupid child! But, baby, where could you find a net big enough to catch the moon with?"

I said, "Surely you could catch it with your hands."

But dâdâ laughed and said, "You are the silliest child I have known. If it came nearer, you would see how big the moon is."

I said, "Dâdâ, what nonsense they teach at your school! When mother bends her face down to kiss us does her face look very big?"

But still dâdâ says, "You are a stupid child."

CLOUDS AND WAVES

MOTHER, the folk who live up in the clouds call out to me

"We play from the time we wake till the day ends.

We play with the golden dawn, we play with the silver moon.

I ask, "But, how am I to get up to you?" They answer, "Come to the edge of the earth, lift up your hands to the sky, and you will be taken up into the clouds."

"My mother is waiting for me at home," I say. "How can I leave her and come?"

Then they smile and float away.

But I know a nicer game than that, mother.

I shall be the cloud and you the moon.

I shall cover you with both my hands, and our house−top will be the blue sky.

The folk who live in the waves call out to me

"We sing from morning till night; on and on we travel and know not where we pass."

I ask, "But, how am I to join you?" They tell me, "Come to the edge of the shore and stand with your eyes

tight shut, and you will be carried out upon the waves."

I say, "My mother always wants me at home in the evening how can I leave her and go?"

Then they smile, dance and pass by.

But I know a better game than that.

I will be the waves and you will be a strange shore.

I shall roll on and on and on, and break upon your lap with laughter.

And no one in the world will know where we both are.

THE CHAMPA FLOWER

SUPPOSING I became a *champa* flower, just for fun, and grew on a branch high up that tree, and shook in the wind with laughter and danced upon the newly budded leaves, would you know me, mother?

You would call, "Baby, where are you?" and I should laugh to myself and keep quite quiet.

I should slyly open my petals and watch you at your work.

When after your bath, with wet hair spread on your shoulders, you walked through the shadow of the *champa* tree to the little court where you say your prayers, you would notice the scent of the flower, but not know that it came from me.

When after the midday meal you sat at the window reading *Ramayana*, and the tree's shadow fell over your hair and your lap, I should fling my wee little shadow on to the page of your book, just where you were reading.

But would you guess that it was the tiny shadow of your little child?

When in the evening you went to the cow−shed with the lighted lamp in your hand, I should suddenly drop on to the earth again and be your own baby once more, and beg you to tell me a story.

"Where have you been, you naughty child?"

"I won't tell you, mother." That's what you and I would say then.

FAIRYLAND

IF people came to know where my king's palace is, it would vanish into the air.

The walls are of white silver and the roof of shining gold.

The queen lives in a palace with seven courtyards, and she wears a jewel that cost all the wealth of seven kingdoms.

But let me tell you, mother, in a whisper, where my king's palace is.

It is at the corner of our terrace where the pot of the *tulsi* plant stands.

The princess lies sleeping on the far−away shore of the seven impassable seas.

There is none in the world who can find her but myself.

She has bracelets on her arms and pearl drops in her ears; her hair sweeps down upon the floor.

She will wake when I touch her with my magic wand, and jewels will fall from her lips when she smiles.

But let me whisper in your ear, mother; she is there in the corner of our terrace where the pot of the *tulsi* plant stands.

When it is time for you to go to the river for your bath, step up to that terrace on the roof.

I sit in the corner where the shadows of the walls meet together.

Only puss is allowed to come with me, for she knows where the barber in the story lives.

But let me whisper, mother, in your ear where the barber in the story lives.

It is at the corner of the terrace where the pot of the *tulsi* plant stands.

THE LAND OF THE EXILE

MOTHER, the light has grown grey in the sky; I do not know what the time is.

There is no fun in my play, so I have come to you. It is Saturday, our holiday.

Leave off your work, mother; sit here by the window and tell me where the desert of Tepântar in the fairy tale is?

The shadow of the rains has covered the day from end to end.

The fierce lightning is scratching the sky with its nails.

When the clouds rumble and it thunders, I love to be afraid in my heart and cling to you.

When the heavy rain patters for hours on the bamboo leaves, and our windows shake and rattle at the gusts of wind, I like to sit alone in the room, mother, with you, and hear you talk about the desert of Tepântar in the fairy tale.

Where is it, mother, on the shore of what sea, at the foot of what hills, in the kingdom of what king?

There are no hedges there to mark the fields, no footpath across it by which the villagers reach their village in the evening, or the woman who gathers dry sticks in the forest can bring her load to the market. With patches of yellow grass in the sand and only one tree where the pair of wise old birds have their nest, lies the desert of Tepântar.

I can imagine how, on just such a cloudy day, the young son of the king is riding alone on a grey horse through the desert, in search of the princess who lies imprisoned in the giant's palace across that unknown water.

When the haze of the rain comes down in the distant sky, and lightning starts up like a sudden fit of pain, does he remember his unhappy mother, abandoned by the king, sweeping the cow−stall and wiping her eyes, while he rides through the desert of Tepântar in the fairy tale?

See, mother, it is almost dark before the day is over, and there are no travellers yonder on the village road.

The shepherd boy has gone home early from the pasture, and men have left their fields to sit on mats under the eaves of their huts, watching the scowling clouds.

Mother, I have left all my books on the shelf do not ask me to do my lessons now.

When I grow up and am big like my father, I shall learn all that must be learnt.

But just for to−day, tell me, mother, where the desert of Tepântar in the fairy tale is?

THE RAINY DAY

SULLEN clouds are gathering fast over the black fringe of the forest.

O child, do not go out!

The palm trees in a row by the lake are smiting their heads against the dismal sky; the crows with their draggled wings are silent on the tamarind branches, and the eastern bank of the river is haunted by a deepening gloom.

Our cow is lowing loud, tied at the fence.

O child, wait here till I bring her into the stall.

Men have crowded into the flooded field to catch the fishes as they escape from the overflowing ponds; the rain water is running in rills through the narrow lanes like a laughing boy who has run away from his mother to tease her.

Listen, someone is shouting for the boatman at the ford.

O child, the daylight is dim, and the crossing at the ferry is closed.

The sky seems to ride fast upon the madly−rushing rain; the water in the river is loud and impatient; women have hastened home early from the Ganges with their filled pitchers.

The evening lamps must be made ready.

O child, do not go out!

The road to the market is desolate, the lane to the river is slippery. The wind is roaring and struggling among the bamboo branches like a wild beast tangled in a net.

PAPER BOATS

DAY by day I float my paper boats one by one down the running stream.

In big black letters I write my name on them and the name of the village where I live.

I hope that someone in some strange land will find them and know who I am.

I load my little boats with *shiuli* flowers from our garden, and hope that these blooms of the dawn will be carried safely to land in the night.

I launch my paper boats and look up into the sky and see the little clouds setting their white bulging sails.

I know not what playmate of mine in the sky sends them down the air to race with my boats!

When night comes I bury my face in my arms and dream that my paper boats float on and on under the midnight stars.

The fairies of sleep are sailing in them, and the lading is their baskets full of dreams.

THE SAILOR

THE boat of the boatman Madhu is moored at the wharf of Rajgunj.

It is uselessly laden with jute, and has been lying there idle for ever so long.

If he would only lend me his boat, I should man her with a hundred oars, and hoist sails, five or six or seven.

I should never steer her to stupid markets. I should sail the seven seas and the thirteen rivers of fairyland.

But, mother, you won't weep for me in a corner.

I am not going into the forest like Ramachandra to come back only after fourteen years.

I shall become the prince of the story, and fill my boat with whatever I like.

I shall take my friend Ashu with me. We shall sail merrily across the seven seas and the thirteen rivers of fairyland.

We shall set sail in the early morning light.

When at noontide you are bathing at the pond, we shall be in the land of a strange king.

We shall pass the ford of Tirpurni, and leave behind us the desert of Tepântar.

When we come back it will be getting dark, and I shall tell you of all that we have seen.

I shall cross the seven seas and the thirteen rivers of fairyland.

THE FURTHER BANK

I LONG to go over there to the further bank of the river,

Where those boats are tied to the bamboo poles in a line;

Where men cross over in their boats in the morning with ploughs on their shoulders to till their far−away fields;

Where the cowherds make their lowing cattle swim across to the riverside pasture;

Whence they all come back home in the evening, leaving the jackals to howl in the island overgrown with weeds,

Mother, if you don't mind, I should like to become the boatman of the ferry when I am grown up.

They say there are strange pools hidden behind that high bank,

Where flocks of wild ducks come when the rains are over, and thick reeds grow round the margins where waterbirds lay their eggs;

Where snipes with their dancing tails stamp their tiny footprints upon the clean soft mud;

Where in the evening the tall grasses crested with white flowers invite the moonbeam to float upon their waves.

Mother, if you don't mind, I should like to become the boatman of the ferryboat when I am grown up.

I shall cross and cross back from bank to bank, and all the boys and girls of the village will wonder at me while they are bathing.

When the sun climbs the mid sky and morning wears on to noon, I shall come running to you, saying, "Mother, I am hungry!"

When the day is done and the shadows cower under the trees, I shall come back in the dusk.

I shall never go away from you into the town to work like father.

Mother, if you don't mind, I should like to become the boatman of the ferryboat when I am grown up.

THE FLOWER−SCHOOL

WHEN storm clouds rumble in the sky and June showers come down,

The moist east wind comes marching over the heath to blow its bagpipes among the bamboos.

Then crowds of flowers come out of a sudden, from nobody knows where, and dance upon the grass in wild glee.

Mother, I really think the flowers go to school underground.

They do their lessons with doors shut, and if they want to come out to play before it is time, their master makes them stand in a corner.

When the rains come they have their holidays.

Branches clash together in the forest, and the leaves rustle in the wild wind, the thunder−clouds clap their giant hands and the flower children rush out in dresses of pink and yellow and white.

Do you know, mother, their home is in the sky, where the stars are.

Haven't you seen how eager they are to get there? Don't you know why they are in such a hurry?

Of course, I can guess to whom they raise their arms: they have their mother as I have my own.

THE MERCHANT

IMAGINE, mother, that you are to stay at home and I am to travel into strange lands.

Imagine that my boat is ready at the landing fully laden.

Now think well, mother, before you say what I shall bring for you when I come back.

Mother, do you want heaps and heaps of gold?

There, by the banks of golden streams, fields are full of golden harvest.

And in the shade of the forest path the golden *champa* flowers drop on the ground.

I will gather them all for you in many hundred baskets.

Mother, do you want pearls big as the raindrops of autumn?

I shall cross to the pearl island shore. There in the early morning light pearls tremble on the meadow flowers, pearls drop on the grass, and pearls are scattered on the sand in spray by the wild sea−waves.

My brother shall have a pair of horses with wings to fly among the clouds.

For father I shall bring a magic pen that, without his knowing, will write of itself.

For you, mother, I must have the casket and jewel that cost seven kings their kingdoms.

SYMPATHY

IF I were only a little puppy, not your baby, mother dear, would you say "No" to me if I tried to eat from your dish?

Would you drive me off, saying to me, "Get away, you naughty little puppy?"

Then go, mother, go! I will never come to you when you call me, and never let you feed me any more.

If I were only a little green parrot, and not your baby, mother dear, would you keep me chained lest I should fly away?

Would you shake your finger at me and say, "What an ungrateful wretch of a bird! It is gnawing at its chain day and night?"

Then, go, mother, go! I will run away into the woods; I will never let you take me in your arms again.

VOCATION

WHEN the gong sounds ten in the morning and I walk to school by our lane,

Every day I meet the hawker crying, "Bangles, crystal bangles!"

There is nothing to hurry him on, there is no road he must take, no place he must go to, no time when he must come home.

I wish I were a hawker, spending my day in the road, crying, "Bangles, crystal bangles!"

When at four in the afternoon I come back from the school,

I can see through the gate of that house the gardener digging the ground.

He does what he likes with his spade, he soils his clothes with dust, nobody takes him to task if he gets baked in the sun or gets wet.

I wish I were a gardener digging away at the garden with nobody to stop me from digging.

Just as it gets dark in the evening and my mother sends me to bed,

I can see through my open window the watchman walking up and down.

The lane is dark and lonely, and the street−lamp stands like a giant with one red eye in its head.

The watchman swings his lantern and walks with his shadow at his side, and never once goes to bed in his life.

I wish I were a watchman walking the streets all night, chasing the shadows with my lantern.

SUPERIOR

MOTHER, your baby is silly! She is so absurdly childish!

She does not know the difference between the lights in the streets and the stars.

When we play at eating with pebbles, she thinks they are real food, and tries to put them into her mouth.

When I open a book before her and ask her to learn her a, b, c, she tears the leaves with her hands and roars for joy at nothing; this is your baby's way of doing her lesson.

When I shake my head at her in anger and scold her and call her naughty, she laughs and thinks it great fun.

Everybody knows that father is away, but if in play I call aloud "Father," she looks about her in excitement and thinks that father is near.

When I hold my class with the donkeys that our washerman brings to carry away the clothes and I warn her that I am the schoolmaster, she will scream for no reason and call me dâdâ. [*elder brother*]

Your baby wants to catch the moon. She is so funny; she calls Ganesh Gânush. [*Ganesh, a common name in India, also that of the god with the elephant's head.*]

Mother, your baby is silly, she is so absurdly childish!

THE LITTLE BIG MAN

I AM small because I am a little child. I shall be big when I am as old as my father is.

My teacher will come and say, "It is late, bring your slate and your books."

I shall tell him, "Do you not know I am as big as father? And I must not have lessons any more."

My master will wonder and say, "He can leave his books if he likes, for he is grown up."

I shall dress myself and walk to the fair where the crowd is thick.

My uncle will come rushing up to me and say, "You will get lost, my boy; let me carry you."

I shall answer, "Can't you see, uncle, I am as big as father. I must go to the fair alone."

Uncle will say, "Yes, he can go wherever he likes, for he is grown up."

Mother will come from her bath when I am giving money to my nurse, for I shall know how to open the box with my key.

Mother will say, "What are you about, naughty child?"

I shall tell her, "Mother, don't you know, I am as big as father, and I must give silver to my nurse."

Mother will say to herself, "He can give money to whom he likes, for he is grown up."

In the holiday time in October father will come home and, thinking that I am still a baby, will bring for me from the town little shoes and small silken frocks.

I shall say, "Father, give them to my dâdâ [*elder brother*], for I am as big as you are."

Father will think and say, "He can buy his own clothes if he likes, for he is grown up."

TWELVE O'CLOCK

MOTHER, I do want to leave off my lessons now. I have been at my book all the morning.

You say it is only twelve o'clock. Suppose it isn't any later; can't you ever think it is afternoon when it is only twelve o'clock?

I can easily imagine now that the sun has reached the edge of that rice−field, and the old fisher−woman is gathering herbs for her supper by the side of the pond.

I can just shut my eyes and think that the shadows are growing darker under the *madar* tree, and the water in the pond looks shiny black.

If twelve o'clock can come in the night, why can't the night come when it is twelve o'clock?

AUTHORSHIP

YOU say that father writes a lot of books, but what he writes I don't understand.

He was reading to you all the evening, but could you really make out what he meant?

What nice stories, mother, you can tell us! Why can't father write like that, I wonder?

Did he never hear from his own mother stories of giants and fairies and princesses?

Has he forgotten them all?

Often when he gets late for his bath you have to go and call him an hundred times.

You wait and keep his dishes warm for him, but he goes on writing and forgets.

Father always plays at making books.

If ever I go to play in father's room, you come and call me, "what a naughty child!"

If I make the slightest noise, you say, "Don't you see that father's at his work?"

What's the fun of always writing and writing?

When I take up father's pen or pencil and write upon his book just as he does, a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, why do you get cross with me, then, mother?

You never say a word when father writes.

When my father wastes such heaps of paper, mother, you don't seem to mind at all.

But if I take only one sheet to make a boat with, you say, "Child, how troublesome you are!"

What do you think of father's spoiling sheets and sheets of paper with black marks all over on both sides?

THE WICKED POSTMAN

WHY do you sit there on the floor so quiet and silent, tell me, mother dear?

The rain is coming in through the open window, making you all wet, and you don't mind it.

Do you hear the gong striking four? It is time for my brother to come home from school.

What has happened to you that you look so strange?

Haven't you got a letter from father to−day?

I saw the postman bringing letters in his bag for almost everybody in the town.

Only, father's letters he keeps to read himself. I am sure the postman is a wicked man.

But don't be unhappy about that, mother dear.

To−morrow is market day in the next village. You ask your maid to buy some pens and papers.

I myself will write all father's letters; you will not find a single mistake.

I shall write from A right up to K.

But, mother, why do you smile?

You don't believe that I can write as nicely as father does!

But I shall rule my paper carefully, and write all the letters beautifully big.

When I finish my writing, do you think I shall be so foolish as father and drop it into the horrid postman's bag?

I shall bring it to you myself without waiting, and letter by letter help you to read my writing.

I know the postman does not like to give you the really nice letters.

THE HERO

MOTHER, let us imagine we are travelling, and passing through a strange and dangerous country.

You are riding in a palanquin and I am trotting by you on a red horse.

It is evening and the sun goes down. The waste of *Joradighi* lies wan and grey before us. The land is desolate

and barren.

You are frightened and thinking "I know not where we have come to."

I say to you, "Mother, do not be afraid."

The meadow is prickly with spiky grass, and through it runs a narrow broken path.

There are no cattle to be seen in the wide field; they have gone to their village stalls.

It grows dark and dim on the land and sky, and we cannot tell where we are going.

Suddenly you call me and ask me in a whisper, "What light is that near the bank?"

Just then there bursts out a fearful yell, and figures come running towards us.

You sit crouched in your palanquin and repeat the names of the gods in prayer.

The bearers, shaking in terror, hide themselves in the thorny bush.

I shout to you, "Don't be afraid, mother. I am here."

With long sticks in their hands and hair all wild about their heads, they come nearer and nearer.

I shout, "Have a care! you villains! One step more and you are dead men."

They give another terrible yell and rush forward.

You clutch my hand and say, "Dear boy, for heaven's sake, keep away from them."

I say, "Mother, just you watch me."

Then I spur my horse for a wild gallop, and my sword and buckler clash against each other.

The fight becomes so fearful, mother, that it would give you a cold shudder could you see it from your palanquin.

Many of them fly, and a great number are cut to pieces.

I know you are thinking, sitting all by yourself, that your boy must be dead by this time.

But I come to you all stained with blood, and say, "Mother, the fight is over now."

You come out and kiss me, pressing me to your heart, and you say to yourself,

"I don't know what I should do if I hadn't my boy to escort me."

A thousand useless things happen day after day, and why couldn't such a thing come true by chance?

It would be like a story in a book.

My brother would say, "Is it possible? I always thought he was so delicate!"

Our village people would all say in amazement, "Was it not lucky that the boy was with his mother?"

THE END

IT is time for me to go, mother; I am going.

When in the paling darkness of the lonely dawn you stretch out your arms for your baby in the bed, I shall say, "Baby is not there!" mother, I am going.

I shall become a delicate draught of air and caress you; and I shall be ripples in the water when you bathe, and kiss you and kiss you again.

In the gusty night when the rain patters on the leaves you will hear my whisper in your bed, and my laughter will flash with the lightning through the open window into your room.

If you lie awake, thinking of your baby till late into the night, I shall sing to you from the stars, "Sleep mother, sleep."

On the straying moonbeams I shall steal over your bed, and lie upon your bosom while you sleep.

I shall become a dream, and through the little opening of your eyelids I shall slip into the depths of your sleep; and when you wake up and look round startled, like a twinkling firefly I shall flit out into the darkness.

When, on the great festival of *puja*, the neighbours' children come and play about the house, I shall melt into the music of the flute and throb in your heart all day.

Dear auntie will come with *puja*−presents and will ask, "Where is our baby, sister? Mother, you will tell her softly, "He is in the pupils of my eyes, he is in my body and in my soul."

THE RECALL

THE night was dark when she went away, and they slept.

The night is dark now, and I call for her, "Come back, my darling; the world is asleep; and no one would know, if you came for a moment while stars are gazing at stars."

She went away when the trees were in bud and the spring was young.

Now the flowers are in high bloom and I call, "Come back, my darling. The children gather and scatter flowers in reckless sport. And if you come and take one little blossom no one will miss it."

Those that used to play are playing still, so spendthrift is life.

I listen to their chatter and call, "Come back, my darling, for mother's heart is full to the brim with love, and if you come to snatch only one little kiss from her no one will grudge it."

THE FIRST JASMINES

AH, these jasmines, these white jasmines!

I seem to remember the first day when I filled my hands with these jasmines, these white jasmines.

I have loved the sunlight, the sky and the green earth;

I have heard the liquid murmur of the river through the darkness of midnight;

Autumn sunsets have come to me at the bend of a road in the lonely waste, like a bride raising her veil to accept her lover.

Yet my memory is still sweet with the first white jasmines that I held in my hand when I was a child.

Many a glad day has come in my life, and I have laughed with merrymakers on festival nights.

On grey mornings of rain I have crooned many an idle song.

I have worn round my neck the evening wreath of *bakulas* woven by the hand of love.

Yet my heart is sweet with the memory of the first fresh jasmines that filled my hands when I was a child.

THE BANYAN TREE

O YOU shaggy−headed banyan tree standing on the bank of the pond, have you forgotten the little child, like the birds that have nested in your branches and left you?

Do you not remember how he sat at the window and wondered at the tangle of your roots that plunged underground?

The women would come to fill their jars in the pond, and your huge black shadow would wriggle on the water like sleep struggling to wake up.

Sunlight danced on the ripples like restless tiny shuttles weaving golden tapestry.

Two ducks swam by the weedy margin above their shadows, and the child would sit still and think.

He longed to be the wind and blow through your rustling branches, to be your shadow and lengthen with the day on the water, to be a bird and perch on your top−most twig, and to float like those ducks among the weeds and shadows.

BENEDICTION

BLESS this little heart, this white soul that has won the kiss of heaven for our earth.

He loves the light of the sun, he loves the sight of his mother's face.

He has not learned to despise the dust, and to hanker after gold.

Clasp him to your heart and bless him.

He has come into this land of an hundred cross−roads.

I know not how he chose you from the crowd, came to your door, and grasped your hand to ask his way.

He will follow you, laughing and talking, and not a doubt in his heart.

Keep his trust, lead him straight and bless him.

Lay your hand on his head, and pray that though the waves underneath grow threatening, yet the breath from above may come and fill his sails and waft him to the haven of peace.

Forget him not in your hurry, let him come to your heart and bless him.

THE GIFT

I WANT to give you something, my child, for we are drifting in the stream of the world.

Our lives will be carried apart, and our love forgotten.

But I am not so foolish as to hope that I could buy your heart with my gifts.

Young is your life, your path long, and you drink the love we bring you at one draught and turn and run away from us.

You have your play and your playmates. What harm is there if you have no time or thought for us.

We, indeed, have leisure enough in old age to count the days that are past, to cherish in our hearts what our hands have lost for ever.

The river runs swift with a song, breaking through all barriers. But the mountain stays and remembers, and follows her with his love.

MY SONG

THIS song of mine will wind its music around you, my child, like the fond arms of love.

This song of mine will touch your forehead like a kiss of blessing.

When you are alone it will sit by your side and whisper in your ear, when you are in the crowd it will fence you about with aloofness.

My song will be like a pair of wings to your dreams, it will transport your heart to the verge of the unknown.

It will be like the faithful star overhead when dark night is over your road.

My song will sit inthe pupils of your eyes, and will carry your sight into the heart of things.

And when my voice is silent in death, my song will speak in your living heart.

THE CHILD−ANGEL

THEY clamour and fight, they doubt and despair, they know no end to their wranglings.

Let your life come amongst them like a flame of light, my child, unflickering and pure, and delight them into silence.

They are cruel in their greed and their envy, their words are like hidden knives thirsting for blood.

Go and stand amidst their scowling hearts, my child, and let your gentle eyes fall upon them like the forgiving peace of the evening over the strife of the day.

Let them see your face, my child, and thus know the meaning of all things; let them love you and thus love each other.

Come and take your seat in the bosom of the limitless, my child. At sunrise open and raise your heart like a blossoming flower, and at sunset bend your head and in silence complete the worship of the day.

THE LAST BARGAIN

"COME and hire me," I cried, while in the morning I was walking on the stone−paved road.

Sword in hand, the King came in his chariot.

He held my hand and said, "I will hire you with my power."

But his power counted for nought, and he went away in his chariot.

In the heat of the midday the houses stood with shut doors.

I wandered along the crooked lane.

An old man came out with his bag of gold.

He pondered and said, "I will hire you with my money."

He weighed his coins one by one, but I turned away.

It was evening. The garden hedge was all aflower.

The fair maid came out and said, "I will hire you with a smile."

Her smile paled and melted into tears, and she went back alone into the dark.

The sun glistened on the sand, and the sea waves broke waywardly.

A child sat playing with shells.

He raised his head and seemed to know me, and said, "I hire you with nothing."

From thenceforward that bargain struck in child's play made me a free man.

THE END

The Fugitive

Rabindranath Tagore

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The Fugitive

Rabindranath Tagore

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THE FUGITIVE

BY

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

TO

W.W. PEARSON

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1

Darkly you sweep on, Eternal Fugitive, round whose bodiless rush stagnant space frets into eddying bubbles of light.

Is your heart lost to the Lover calling you across his immeasurable loneliness?

Is the aching urgency of your haste the sole reason why your tangled tresses break into stormy riot and pearls of fire roll along your path as from a broken necklace?

Your fleeting steps kiss the dust of this world into sweetness, sweeping aside all waste; the storm centred with your dancing limbs shakes the sacred shower of death over life and freshens her growth.

Should you in sudden weariness stop for a moment, the world would rumble into a heap, an encumbrance, barring its own progress, and even the least speck of dust would pierce the sky throughout its infinity with an unbearable pressure.

My thoughts are quickened by this rhythm of unseen feet round which the anklets of light are shaken.

They echo in the pulse of my heart, and through my blood surges the psalm of the ancient sea.

I hear the thundering flood tumbling my life from world to world and form to form, scattering my being in an endless spray of gifts, in sorrowings and songs.

The tide runs high, the wind blows, the boat dances like thine own desire, my heart!

Leave the hoard on the shore and sail over the unfathomed dark towards limitless light.

2

We came hither together, friend, and now at the cross−roads I stop to bid you farewell.

Your path is wide and straight before you, but my call comes up by ways from the unknown.

I shall follow wind and cloud; I shall follow the stars to where day breaks behind the hills; I shall follow lovers who, as they walk, twine their days into a wreath on a single thread of song, “I love.”

3

It was growing dark when I asked her, “What strange land have I come to?”

She only lowered her eyes, and the water gurgled in the throat of her jar, as she walked away.

The trees hang vaguely over the bank, and the land appears as though it already belonged to the past.

The water is dumb, the bamboos are darkly still, a wristlet tinkles against the water−jar from down the lane.

Row no more, but fasten the boat to this tree,—for I love the look of this land.

The evening star goes down behind the temple dome, and the pallor of the marble landing haunts the dark water.

Belated wayfarers sigh; for light from hidden windows is splintered into the darkness by intervening wayside trees and bushes. Still that wristlet tinkles against the water−jar, and retreating steps rustle from down the lane littered with leaves.

The night deepens, the palace towers loom spectre−like, and the town hums wearily.

Row no more, but fasten the boat to a tree.

Let me seek rest in this strange land, dimly lying under the stars, where darkness tingles with the tinkle of a wristlet knocking against a water−jar.

4

O that I were stored with a secret, like unshed rain in summer clouds—a secret, folded up in silence, that I could wander away with.

O that I had some one to whisper to, where slow waters lap under trees that doze in the sun.

The hush this evening seems to expect a footfall, and you ask me for the cause of my tears.

I cannot give a reason why I weep, for that is a secret still withheld from me.

5

For once be careless, timid traveller, and utterly lose your way; wide−awake though you are, be like broad daylight enticed by and netted in mist.

Do not shun the garden of Lost Hearts waiting at the end of the wrong road, where the grass is strewn with wrecked red flowers, and disconsolate water heaves in the troubled sea.

Long have you watched over the store gathered by weary years. Let it be stripped, with nothing remaining but the desolate triumph of losing all.

6

Two little bare feet flit over the ground, and seem to embody that metaphor, “Flowers are the footprints of summer.”

They lightly impress on the dust the chronicle of their adventure, to be erased by a passing breeze.

Come, stray into my heart, you tender little feet, and leave the everlasting print of songs on my dreamland path.

7

I am like the night to you, little flower.

I can only give you peace and a wakeful silence hidden in the dark.

When in the morning you open your eyes, I shall leave you to a world a−hum with bees, and songful with birds.

My last gift to you will be a tear dropped into the depth of your youth; it will make your smile all the sweeter, and bemist your outlook on the pitiless mirth of day.

8

Do not stand before my window with those hungry eyes and beg for my secret. It is but a tiny stone of glistening pain streaked with blood−red by passion.

What gifts have you brought in both hands to fling before me in the dust?

I fear, if I accept, to create a debt that can never be paid even by the loss of all I have.

Do not stand before my window with your youth and flowers to shame my destitute life.

9

If I were living in the royal town of Ujjain, when Kalidas was the king's poet, I should know some Malwa girl and fill my thoughts with the music of her name. She would glance at me through the slanting shadow of her eyelids, and allow her veil to catch in the jasmine as an excuse for lingering near me.

This very thing happened in some past whose track is lost under time's dead leaves.

The scholars fight to−day about dates that play hide−and−seek.

I do not break my heart dreaming over flown and vanished ages: but alas and alas again, that those Malwa girls have followed them!

To what heaven, I wonder, have they carried in their flower−baskets those days that tingled to the lyrics of the king's poet?

This morning, separation from those whom I was born too late to meet weighs on and saddens my heart.

Yet April carries the same flowers with which they decked their hair, and the same south breeze fluttered their veils as whispers over modern roses.

And, to tell the truth, joys are not lacking to this spring, though Kalidas sing no more; and I know, if he can watch me from the Poets' Paradise, he has reasons to be envious.

10

Be not concerned about her heart, my heart: leave it in the dark.

What if her beauty be of the figure and her smile merely of the face? Let me take without question the simple meaning of her glances and be happy.

I care not if it be a web of delusion that her arms wind about me, for the web itself is rich and rare, and the deceit can be smiled at and forgotten.

Be not concerned about her heart, my heart: be content if the music is true, though the words are not to be believed; enjoy the grace that dances like a lily on the rippling, deceiving surface, whatever may lie beneath.

11

Neither mother nor daughter are you, nor bride, Urvashi.[1] Woman you are, to ravish the soul of Paradise.

[Footnote 1: The dancing girl of Paradise who rose from the sea.]

When weary−footed evening comes down to the folds whither the cattle have returned, you never trim the house lamps nor walk to the bridal bed with a tremulous heart and a wavering smile on your lips, glad that the dark hours are so secret.

Like the dawn you are without veil, Urvashi, and without shame.

Who can imagine that aching overflow of splendour which created you!

You rose from the churned ocean on the first day of the first spring, with the cup of life in your right hand and poison in your left. The monster sea, lulled like an enchanted snake, laid down its thousand hoods at your feet.

Your unblemished radiance rose from the foam, white and naked as a jasmine.

Were you ever small, timid or in bud, Urvashi, O Youth everlasting?

Did you sleep, cradled in the deep blue night where the strange light of gems plays over coral, shells and moving creatures of dreamlike form, till day revealed your awful fulness of bloom?

Adored are you of all men in all ages, Urvashi, O endless wonder!

The world throbs with youthful pain at the glance of your eyes, the ascetic lays the fruit of his austerities at your feet, the songs of poets hum and swarm round the perfume of your presence. Your feet, as in careless joy they flit on, wound even the heart of the hollow wind with the tinkle of golden bells.

When you dance before the gods, flinging orbits of novel rhythm into space, Urvashi, the earth shivers, leaf and grass, and autumn fields heave and sway; the sea surges into a frenzy of rhyming waves; the stars drop into the sky—beads from the chain that leaps till it breaks on your breast; and the blood dances in men's hearts with sudden turmoil.

You are the first break on the crest of heaven's slumber, Urvashi, you thrill the air with unrest. The world bathes your limbs in her tears; with colour of her heart's blood are your feet red; lightly you poise on the wave−tossed lotus of desire, Urvashi; you play forever in that limitless mind wherein labours God's tumultuous dream.

12

You, like a rivulet swift and sinuous, laugh and dance, and your steps sing as you trip along.

I, like a bank rugged and steep, stand speechless and stock−still and darkly gaze at you.

I, like a big, foolish storm, of a sudden come rushing on and try to rend my being and scatter it parcelled in a whirl of passion.

You, like the lightning's flash slender and keen, pierce the heart of the turbulent darkness, to disappear in a vivid streak of laughter.

13

You desired my love and yet you did not love me.

Therefore my life clings to you like a chain of which clank and grip grow harsher the more you struggle to be free.

My despair has become your deadly companion, clutching at the faintest of your favours, trying to drag you away into the cavern of tears.

You have shattered my freedom, and with its wreck built your own prison.

14

I am glad you will not wait for me with that lingering pity in your look.

It is only the spell of the night and my farewell words, startled at their own tune of despair, which bring these tears to my eyes. But day will dawn, my eyes will dry and my heart; and there will be no time for weeping.

Who says it is hard to forget?

The mercy of death works at life's core, bringing it respite from its own foolish persistence.

The stormy sea is lulled at last in its rocking cradle; the forest fire falls to sleep on its bed of ashes.

You and I shall part, and the cleavage will be hidden under living grass and flowers that laugh in the sun.

15

Of all days you have chosen this one to visit my garden.

But the storm passed over my roses last night and the grass is strewn with torn leaves.

I do not know what has brought you, now that the hedges are laid low and rills run in the walks; the prodigal wealth of spring is scattered and the scent and song of yesterday are wrecked.

Yet stay a while; let me find some remnant flowers, though I doubt if your skirt can be filled.

The time will be short, for the clouds thicken and here comes the rain again!

16

I forgot myself for a moment, and I came.

But raise your eyes, and let me know if there still linger some shadow of other days, like a pale cloud on the horizon that has been robbed of its rain.

For a moment bear with me if I forget myself.

The roses are still in bud; they do not yet know how we neglect to gather flowers this summer.

The morning star has the same palpitating hush; the early light is enmeshed in the branches that overbrow your window, as in those other days.

That times are changed I forget for a little, and have come.

I forget if you ever shamed me by looking away when I bared my heart.

I only remember the words that stranded on the tremor of your lips; I remember in your dark eyes sweeping shadows of passion, like the wings of a home−seeking bird in the dusk.

I forget that you do not remember, and I come.

17

The rain fell fast. The river rushed and hissed. It licked up and swallowed the island, while I waited alone on the lessening bank with my sheaves of corn in a heap.

From the shadows of the opposite shore the boat crosses with a woman at the helm.

I cry to her, “Come to my island coiled round with hungry water, and take away my year's harvest.”

She comes, and takes all that I have to the last grain; I ask her to take me.

But she says, “No”—the boat is laden with my gift and no room is left for me.

18

The evening beckons, and I would fain follow the travellers who sailed in the last ferry of the ebb−tide to cross the dark.

Some were for home, some for the farther shore, yet all have ventured to sail.

But I sit alone at the landing, having left my home and missed the boat: summer is gone and my winter harvest is lost.

I wait for that love which gathers failures to sow them in tears on the dark, that they may bear fruit when day rises anew.

19

On this side of the water there is no landing; the girls do not come here to fetch water; the land along its edge is shaggy with stunted shrubs; a noisy flock of *saliks* dig their nests in the steep bank under whose frown the fisher−boats find no shelter.

You sit there on the unfrequented grass, and the morning wears on. Tell me what you do on this bank so dry that it is agape with cracks?

She looks in my face and says, “Nothing, nothing whatsoever.”

On this side of the river the bank is deserted, and no cattle come to water. Only some stray goats from the village browse the scanty grass all day, and the solitary water−hawk watches from an uprooted *peepal* aslant over the mud.

You sit there alone in the miserly shade of a *shimool,* and the morning wears on.

Tell me, for whom do you wait?

She looks in my face and says, “No one, no one at all!”

20. KACHA AND DEVAYANI

KACHA AND DEVAYANI

Young Kacha came from Paradise to learn the secret of immortality from a Sage who taught the Titans, and whose daughter Devayani fell in love with him.

KACHA

The time has come for me to take leave, Devayani; I have long sat at your father's feet, but to−day he completed his teaching. Graciously allow me to go back to the land of the Gods whence I came.

DEVAYANI

You have, as you desired, won that rare knowledge coveted by the Gods;—but think, do you aspire after nothing further?

KACHA

Nothing.

DEVAYANI

Nothing at all! Dive into the bottom of your heart; does no timid wish lurk there, fearful lest it be blighted?

KACHA

For me the sun of fulfilment has risen, and the stars have faded in its light. I have mastered the knowledge which gives life.

DEVAYANI

Then you must be the one happy being in creation. Alas! now for the first time I feel what torture these days spent in an alien land have been to you, though we offered you our best.

KACHA

Not so much bitterness! Smile, and give me leave to go.

DEVAYANI

Smile! But, my friend, this is not your native Paradise. Smiles are not so cheap in this world, where thirst, like a worm in the flower, gnaws at the heart's core; where baffled desire hovers round the desired, and memory never ceases to sigh foolishly after vanished joy.

KACHA

Devayani, tell me how I have offended?

DEVAYANI

Is it so easy for you to leave this forest, which through long years has lavished on you shade and song? Do you not feel how the wind wails through these glimmering shadows, and dry leaves whirl in the air, like ghosts of lost hope;—while you alone, who part from us, have a smile on your lips?

KACHA

This forest has been a second mother to me, for here I have been born again. My love for it shall never dwindle.

DEVAYANI

When you had driven the cattle to graze on the lawn, yonder banyan tree spread a hospitable shade for your tired limbs against the mid−day heat.

KACHA

I bow to thee, Lord of the Forest! Remember me, when under thy shade other students chant their lessons to an accompaniment of bees humming and leaves rustling.

DEVAYANI

And do not forget our Venumati, whose swift water is one stream of singing love.

KACHA

I shall ever remember her, the dear companion of my exile, who, like a busy village girl, smiles on her errand of ceaseless service and croons a simple song.

DEVAYANI

But, friend, let me also remind you that you had another companion whose thoughts were vainly busy to make you forget an exile's cares.

KACHA

The memory of her has become a part of my life.

DEVAYANI

I recall the day when, little more than a boy, you first arrived. You stood there, near the hedge of the garden, a smile in your eyes.

KACHA

And I saw you gathering flowers—clad in white, like the dawn bathed in radiance. And I said, “Make me proud by allowing me to help you!”

DEVAYANI

I asked in surprise who you were, and you meekly answered that you were the son of Vrihaspati, a divine sage at the court of the God Indra, and desired to learn from my father that secret spell which can revive the dead.

KACHA

I feared lest the Master, the teacher of the Titans, those rivals of the Gods, should refuse to accept me for a disciple.

DEVAYANI

But he could not refuse me when I pleaded your cause, so greatly he loves his daughter.

KACHA

Thrice had the jealous Titans slain me, and thrice you prevailed on your father to bring me back to life; therefore my gratitude can never die.

DEVAYANI

Gratitude! Forget all—I shall not grieve. Do you only remember benefits? Let them perish! If after the day's lessons, in the evening solitude, some strange tremor of joy shook your heart, remember that—but not gratitude. If, as some one passed, a snatch of song got tangled among your texts or the swing of a robe fluttered your studies with delight, remember that when at leisure in your Paradise. What, benefits only!—and neither beauty nor love nor...?

KACHA

Some things are beyond the power of words.

DEVAYANI

Yes, yes, I know. My love has sounded your heart's deepest, and makes me bold to speak in defiance of your reserve. Never leave me! remain here! fame gives no happiness. Friend, you cannot now escape, for your secret is mine!

KACHA

No, no, Devayani.

DEVAYANI

How “No”? Do not lie to me! Love's insight is divine. Day after day, in raising your head, in a glance, in the motion of your hands, your love spoke as the sea speaks through its waves. On a sudden my voice would send your heart quivering through your limbs—have I never witnessed it? I know you, and therefore you are my captive for ever. The very king of your Gods shall not sever this bond.

KACHA

Was it for this, Devayani, that I toiled, away from home and kindred, all these years?

DEVAYANI

Why not? Is only knowledge precious? Is love cheap? Lay hold on this moment. Have the courage to own that a woman's heart is worth all as much penance as men undergo for the sake of power, knowledge, or reputation.

KACHA

I gave my solemn promise to the Gods that I would bring them this lore of deathless life.

DEVAYANI

But is it true you had eyes for nothing save your books? That you never broke off your studies to pay me homage with flowers, never lay in wait for a chance, of an evening, to help me water my flower−beds? What made you sit by me on the grass and sing songs you brought hither from the assembly of the stars, while darkness stooped over the river bank as love droops over its own sad silence? Were these parts of a cruel conspiracy plotted in your Paradise? Was all for the sake of access to my father's heart?—and after success, were you, departing, to throw some cheap gratitude, like small coins, to the deluded door−keeper?

KACHA

What profit were there, proud woman, in knowing the truth? If I did wrong to serve you with a passionate devotion cherished in secret, I have had ample punishment. This is no time to question whether my love be true or not; my life's work awaits me. Though my heart must henceforth enclose a red flame vainly striving to devour emptiness, still I must go back to that Paradise which will nevermore be Paradise to me. I owe the Gods a new divinity, hard won by my studies, before I may think of happiness. Forgive me, Devayani, and know that my suffering is doubled by the pain I unwillingly inflict on you.

DEVAYANI

Forgiveness! You have angered my heart till it is hard and burning like a thunderbolt! You can go back to your work and your glory, but what is left for me? Memory is a bed of thorns, and secret shame will gnaw at the roots of my life. You came like a wayfarer, sat through the sunny hours in the shade of my garden, and to while time away you plucked all its flowers and wove them into a chain. And now, parting, you snap the thread and let the flowers drop on the dust! Accursed be that great knowledge you have earned!—a burden that, though others share equally with you, will never be lightened. For lack of love may it ever remain as foreign to your life as the cold stars are to the un−espoused darkness of virgin Night!

21

I

“Why these preparations without end?”—I said to Mind—“Is some one to come?”

Mind replied, “I am enormously busy gathering things and building towers. I have no time to answer such questions.”

Meekly I went back to my work.

When things were grown to a pile, when seven wings of his palace were complete, I said to Mind, “Is it not enough?”

Mind began to say, “Not enough to contain—” and then stopped.

“Contain what?” I asked.

Mind affected not to hear.

I suspected that Mind did not know, and with ceaseless work smothered the question.

His one refrain was, “I must have more.”

“Why must you?”

“Because it is great.”

“What is great?”

Mind remained silent. I pressed for an answer.

In contempt and anger, Mind said, “Why ask about things that are not? Take notice of those that are hugely before you,—the struggle and the fight, the army and armaments, the bricks and mortar, and labourers without

number."

I thought "Possibly Mind is wise."

II

Days passed. More wings were added to his palace—more lands to his domain.

The season of rains came to an end. The dark clouds became white and thin, and in the rain−washed sky the sunny hours hovered like butterflies over an unseen flower. I was bewildered and asked everybody I met, "What is that music in the breeze?"

A tramp walked the road whose dress was wild as his manner; he said, "Hark to the music of the Coming!"

I cannot tell why I was convinced, but the words broke from me, "We have not much longer to wait."

"It is close at hand," said the mad man.

I went to the office and boldly said to Mind, "Stop all work!"

Mind asked, "Have you any news?"

"Yes," I answered, "News of the Coming." But I could not explain.

Mind shook his head and said, "There are neither banners nor pageantry!"

III

The night waned, the stars paled in the sky. Suddenly the touchstone of the morning light tinged everything with gold. A cry spread from mouth to mouth—

"Here is the herald!"

I bowed my head and asked, "Is he coming?"

The answer seemed to burst from all sides, "Yes."

Mind grew troubled and said, "The dome of my building is not yet finished, nothing is in order."

A voice came from the sky, "Pull down your building!"

"But why?" asked Mind.

"Because to−day is the day of the Coming, and your building is in the way."

IV

The lofty building lies in the dust and all is scattered and broken.

Mind looked about. But what was there to see?

Only the morning star and the lily washed in dew.

And what else? A child running laughing from its mother's arms into the open light.

“Was it only for this that they said it was the day of the Coming?”

“Yes, this was why they said there was music in the air and light in the sky.”

“And did they claim all the earth only for this?”

“Yes,” came the answer. “Mind, you build walls to imprison yourself. Your servants toil to enslave themselves; but the whole earth and infinite space are for the child, for the New Life.”

“What does that child bring you?”

“Hope for all the world and its joy.”

Mind asked me, “Poet, do you understand?”

“I lay my work aside,” I said, “for I must have time to understand.”

22. TRANSLATIONS. VAISHNAVA SONGS

1

Oh Sakhi,[1] my sorrow knows no bounds.

[Footnote 1: The woman friend of a woman.]

August comes laden with rain clouds and my house is desolate.

The stormy sky growls, the earth is flooded with rain, my love is far away, and my heart is torn with anguish.

The peacocks dance, for the clouds rumble and frogs croak.

The night brims with darkness flicked with lightning.

Vidyapati[2] asks, “Maiden, how are you to spend your days and nights without your lord?”

[Footnote 2: The name of the poet.]

2

Lucky was my awakening this morning, for I saw my beloved.

The sky was one piece of joy, and my life and youth were fulfilled.

To−day my house becomes my house in truth, and my body my body.

Fortune has proved a friend, and my doubts are dispelled.

Birds, sing your best; moon, shed your fairest light!

Let fly your darts, Love−God, in millions!

I wait for the moment when my body will grow golden at his touch.

Vidyapati says, “Immense is your good fortune, and blessed is your love.”

3

I feel my body vanishing into the dust whereon my beloved walks.

I feel one with the water of the lake where he bathes.

Oh Sakhi, my love crosses death's boundary when I meet him.

My heart melts in the light and merges in the mirror whereby he views his face.

I move with the air to kiss him when he waves his fan, and wherever he wanders I enclose him like the sky.

Govindadas says, “You are the gold−setting, fair maiden, he is the emerald.”

4

My love, I will keep you hidden in my eyes; I will thread your image like a gem on my joy and hang it on my bosom.

You have been in my heart ever since I was a child, throughout my youth, throughout my life, even through all my dreams.

You dwell in my being when I sleep and when I wake.

Know that I am a woman, and bear with me when you find me wanting.

For I have thought and thought and know for certain that all that is left for me in this world is your love, and if I lose you for a moment I die.

Chandidas says, “Be tender to her who is yours in life and death.”

5

“Fruit to sell, Fruit to sell,” cried the woman at the door.

The Child came out of the house.

“Give me some fruit,” said he, putting a handful of rice in her basket.

The fruit−seller gazed at his face and her eyes swam with tears.

“Who is the fortunate mother,” she cried, “that has clasped you in her arms and fed you at her breast, and whom your dear voice called 'Mother'?”

“Offer your fruit to him,” says the poet, “and with it your life.”

II

1

Endlessly varied art thou in the exuberant world, Lady of Manifold Magnificence. Thy path is strewn with lights, thy touch thrills into flowers; that trailing skirt of thine sweeps the whirl of a dance among the stars, and thy many−toned music is echoed from innumerable worlds through signs and colours.

Single and alone in the unfathomed stillness of the soul, art thou, Lady of Silence and Solitude, a vision thrilled with light, a lonely lotus blossoming on the stem of love.

2

Behind the rusty iron gratings of the opposite window sits a girl, dark and plain of face, like a boat stranded on a sand−bank when the river is shallow in the summer.

I come back to my room after my day's work, and my tired eyes are lured to her.

She seems to me like a lake with its dark lonely waters edged by moonlight.

She has only her window for freedom: there the morning light meets her musings, and through it her dark eyes like lost stars travel back to their sky.

3

I remember the day.

The heavy shower of rain is slackening into fitful pauses, renewed gusts of wind startle it from a first lull.

I take up my instrument. Idly I touch the strings, till, without my knowing, the music borrows the mad cadence of that storm.

I see her figure as she steals from her work, stops at my door, and retreats with hesitating steps. She comes again, stands outside leaning against the wall, then slowly enters the room and sits down. With head bent, she plies her needle in silence; but soon stops her work, and looks out of the window through the rain at the blurred line of trees.

Only this—one hour of a rainy noon filled with shadows and song and silence.

4

While stepping into the carriage she turned her head and threw me a swift glance of farewell.

This was her last gift to me. But where can I keep it safe from the trampling hours?

Must evening sweep this gleam of anguish away, as it will the last flicker of fire from the sunset?

Ought it to be washed off by the rain, as treasured pollens are from heart−broken flowers?

Leave kingly glory and the wealth of the rich to death. But may not tears keep ever fresh the memory of a glance flung through a passionate moment?

“Give it to me to keep,” said my song; “I never touch kings' glory or the wealth of the rich, but these small things are mine for ever.”

5

You give yourself to me, like a flower that blossoms at night, whose presence is known by the dew that drips from it, by the odour shed through the darkness, as the first steps of Spring are by the buds that thicken the twigs.

You break upon my thought like waves at the high tide, and my heart is drowned under surging songs.

My heart knew of your coming, as the night feels the approach of dawn. The clouds are aflame and my sky fills with a great revealing flood.

6

I was to go away; still she did not speak. But I felt, from a slight quiver, her yearning arms would say: “Ah no, not yet.”

I have often heard her pleading hands vocal in a touch, though they knew not what they said.

I have known those arms to stammer when, had they not, they would have become youth's garland round my neck.

Their little gestures return to remembrance in the covert of still hours, like truants they playfully reveal things she had kept secret from me.

7

My songs are like bees; they follow through the air some fragrant trace—some memory—of you, to hum around your shyness, eager for its hidden store.

When the freshness of dawn droops in the sun, when in the noon the air hangs low with heaviness and the forest is silent, my songs return home, their languid wings dusted with gold.

8

I believe you had visited me in a vision before we ever met, like some foretaste of April before the spring broke into flower.

That vision must have come when all was bathed in the odour of *sal* blossom; when the twilight twinkle of the river fringed its yellow sands, and the vague sounds of a summer afternoon were blended; yes, and had it not laughed and evaded me in many a nameless gleam at other moments?

9

I think I shall stop startled if ever we meet after our next birth, walking in the light of a far−away world.

I shall know those dark eyes then as morning stars, and yet feel that they have belonged to some unremembered evening sky of a former life.

I shall know that the magic of your face is not all its own, but has stolen the passionate light that was in my eyes at some immemorial meeting, and then gathered from my love a mystery that has now forgotten its origin.

10

Lay down your lute, my love, leave your arms free to embrace me.

Let your touch bring my overflowing heart to my body's utmost brink.

Do not bend your neck and turn away your face, but offer up a kiss to me, which has been like some perfume long closed in a bud.

Do not smother this moment under vain words, but let our hearts quake in a rush of silence sweeping all thoughts to the shoreless delight.

11

You have made me great with your love, though I am but one among the many, drifting in the common tide, rocking in the fluctuant favour of the world.

You have given me a seat where poets of all time bring their tribute, and lovers with deathless names greet one another across the ages.

Men hastily pass me in the market,—never noting how my body has grown precious with your caress, how I carry your kiss within, as the sun carries in its orb the fire of the divine touch and shines for ever.

12

Like a child that frets and pushes away its toys, my heart to−day shakes its head at every phrase I suggest, and says, “No, not this.”

Yet words, in the agony of their vagueness, haunt my mind, like vagrant clouds hovering over hills, waiting for some chance wind to relieve them of their rain.

But leave these vain efforts, my soul, for the stillness will ripen its own music in the dark.

My life to−day is like a cloister during some penance, where the spring is afraid to stir or to whisper.

This is not the time, my love, for you to pass the gate; at the mere thought of your anklet bells tinkling down the path, the garden echoes are ashamed.

Know that to−morrow's songs are in bud to−day, and should they see you walk by they would strain to breaking their immature hearts.

13

Whence do you bring this disquiet, my love?

Let my heart touch yours and kiss the pain out of your silence.

The night has thrown up from its depth this little hour, that love may build a new world within these shut doors, to be lighted by this solitary lamp.

We have for music but a single reed which our two pairs of lips must play on by turns—for crown, only one garland to bind my hair after I have put it on your forehead.

Tearing the veil from my breast I shall make our bed on the floor; and one kiss and one sleep of delight shall fill our small boundless world.

14

All that I had I gave to you, keeping but the barest veil of reserve.

It is so thin that you secretly smile at it and I feel ashamed.

The gust of the spring breeze sweeps it away unawares, and the flutter of my own heart moves it as the waves move their foam.

My love, do not grieve if I keep this flimsy mist of distance round me.

This frail reserve of mine is no mere woman's coyness, but a slender stem on which the flower of my self−surrender bends towards you with reticent grace.

15

I have donned this new robe to−day because my body feels like singing.

It is not enough that I am given to my love once and for ever, but out of that I must fashion new gifts every day; and shall I not seem a fresh offering, dressed in a new robe?

My heart, like the evening sky, has its endless passion for colour, and therefore I change my veils, which have now the green of the cool young grass and now that of the winter rice.

To−day my robe is tinted with the rain−rimmed blue of the sky. It brings to my limbs the colour of the boundless, the colour of the oversea hills; and it carries in its folds the delight of summer clouds flying in the wind.

16

I thought I would write love's words in their own colour; but that lies deep in the heart, and tears are pale.

Would you know them, friend, if the words were colourless?

I thought I would sing love's words to their own tune, but that sounds only in my heart, and my eyes are silent.

Would you know them, friend, if there were no tune?

17

In the night the song came to me; but you were not there.

It found the words for which I had been seeking all day. Yes, in the stillness a moment after dark they throbbed into music, even as the stars then began to pulse with light; but you were not there. My hope was to sing it to you in the morning; but, try as I might, though the music came, the words hung back, when you were beside me.

18

The night deepens and the dying flame flickers in the lamp.

I forgot to notice when the evening—like a village girl who has filled her pitcher at the river a last time for that day—closed the door on her cabin.

I was speaking to you, my love, with mind barely conscious of my voice—tell me, had it any meaning? Did it bring you any message from beyond life's borders?

For now, since my voice has ceased, I feel the night throbbing with thoughts that gaze in awe at the abyss of their dumbness.

19

When we two first met my heart rang out in music, “She who is eternally afar is beside you for ever.”

That music is silent, because I have grown to believe that my love is only near, and have forgotten that she is also far, far away.

Music fills the infinite between two souls. This has been muffled by the mist of our daily habits.

On shy summer nights, when the breeze brings a vast murmur out of the silence, I sit up in my bed and mourn the great loss of her who is beside me. I ask myself, “When shall I have another chance to whisper to her words with the rhythm of eternity in them?”

Wake up, my song, from thy languor, rend this screen of the familiar, and fly to my beloved there, in the endless surprise of our first meeting!

20

Lovers come to you, my Queen, and proudly lay their riches at your feet: but my tribute is made up of unfulfilled hopes.

Shadows have stolen across the heart of my world and the best in me has lost light.

While the fortunate laugh at my penury, I ask you to lend my failings your tears, and so make them precious.

I bring you a voiceless instrument.

I strained to reach a note which was too high in my heart, and the string broke.

While masters laugh at the snapped cord, I ask you to take my lute in your hands and fill its hollowness with your songs.

21

The father came back from the funeral rites.

His boy of seven stood at the window, with eyes wide open and a golden amulet hanging from his neck, full of thoughts too difficult for his age.

His father took him in his arms and the boy asked him, “Where is mother?”

“In heaven,” answered his father, pointing to the sky.

At night the father groaned in slumber, weary with grief.

A lamp dimly burned near the bedroom door, and a lizard chased moths on the wall.

The boy woke up from sleep, felt with his hands the emptiness in the bed, and stole out to the open terrace.

The boy raised his eyes to the sky and long gazed in silence. His bewildered mind sent abroad into the night the question, “Where is heaven?”

No answer came: and the stars seemed like the burning tears of that ignorant darkness.

22

She went away when the night was about to wane.

My mind tried to console me by saying, “All is vanity.”

I felt angry and said, “That unopened letter with her name on it, and this palm−leaf fan bordered with red silk by her own hands, are they not real?”

The day passed, and my friend came and said to me, “Whatever is good is true, and can never perish.”

“How do you know?” I asked impatiently; “was not this body good which is now lost to the world?”

As a fretful child hurting its own mother, I tried to wreck all the shelters that ever I had, in and about me, and cried, “This world is treacherous.”

Suddenly I felt a voice saying—“Ungrateful!”

I looked out of the window, and a reproach seemed to come from the star−sprinkled night,—“You pour out

into the void of my absence your faith in the truth that I came!”

23

The river is grey and the air dazed with blown sand.

On a morning of dark disquiet, when the birds are mute and their nests shake in the gust, I sit alone and ask myself, “Where is she?”

The days have flown wherein we sat too near each other; we laughed and jested, and the awe of love's majesty found no words at our meetings.

I made myself small, and she trifled away every moment with pelting talk.

To−day I wish in vain that she were by me, in the gloom of the coming storm, to sit in the soul's solitude.

24

The name she called me by, like a flourishing jasmine, covered the whole seventeen years of our love. With its sound mingled the quiver of the light through the leaves, the scent of the grass in the rainy night, and the sad silence of the last hour of many an idle day.

Not the work of God alone was he who answered to that name; she created him again for herself during those seventeen swift years.

Other years were to follow, but their vagrant days, no longer gathered within the fold of that name uttered in her voice, stray and are scattered.

They ask me, “Who should fold us?”

I find no answer and sit silent, and they cry to me while dispersing, “We seek a shepherdess!”

Whom should they seek?

That they do not know. And like derelict evening clouds they drift in the trackless dark, and are lost and forgotten.

25

I feel that your brief days of love have not been left behind in those scanty years of your life.

I seek to know in what place, away from the slow−thieving dust, you keep them now. I find in my solitude some song of your evening that died, yet left a deathless echo; and the sighs of your unsatisfied hours I find nestled in the warm quiet of the autumn noon.

Your desires come from the hive of the past to haunt my heart, and I sit still to listen to their wings.

26

You have taken a bath in the dark sea. You are once again veiled in a bride's robe, and through death's arch you come back to repeat our wedding in the soul.

Neither lute nor drum is struck, no crowd has gathered, not a wreath is hung on the gate.

Your unuttered words meet mine in a ritual unillumined by lamps.

27

I was walking along a path overgrown with grass, when suddenly I heard from some one behind, “See if you know me?”

I turned round and looked at her and said, “I cannot remember your name.”

She said, “I am that first great Sorrow whom you met when you were young.”

Her eyes looked like a morning whose dew is still in the air.

I stood silent for some time till I said, “Have you lost all the great burden of your tears?”

She smiled and said nothing. I felt that her tears had had time to learn the language of smiles.

“Once you said,” she whispered, “that you would cherish your grief for ever.”

I blushed and said, “Yes, but years have passed and I forget.”

Then I took her hand in mine and said, “But you have changed.”

“What was sorrow once has now become peace,” she said.

28

Our life sails on the uncrossed sea whose waves chase each other in an eternal hide−and−seek.

It is the restless sea of change, feeding its foaming flocks to lose them over and over again, beating its hands against the calm of the sky.

Love, in the centre of this circling war−dance of light and dark, yours is that green island, where the sun kisses the shy forest shade and silence is wooed by birds' singing.

29

AMA AND VINAYAKA

AMA AND VINAYAKA

Night on the battlefield: AMA *meets her father* VINAYAKA.

AMA

Father!

VINAYAKA

Shameless wanton, you call me “Father”! you who did not shrink from a Mussulman husband!

AMA

Though you have treacherously killed my husband, yet you are my father; and I hold back a widow's tears, lest they bring God's curse on you. Since we have met on this battlefield after years of separation, let me bow to your feet and take my last leave!

VINAYAKA

Where will you go, Ama? The tree on which you built your impious nest is hewn down. Where will *you* take shelter?

AMA

I have my son.

VINAYAKA

Leave him! Cast never a fond look back on the result of a sin expiated with blood! Think where to go.

AMA

Death's open gates are wider than a father's love!

VINAYAKA

Death indeed swallows sins as the sea swallows the mud of rivers. But you are to die neither to−night nor here. Seek some solitary shrine of holy Shiva far from shamed kindred and all neighbours; bathe three times a day in sacred Ganges, and, while reciting God's name, listen to the last bell of evening worship, that Death may look tenderly upon you, as a father on his sleeping child whose eyes are still wet with tears. Let him gently carry you into his own great silence, as the Ganges carries a fallen flower on its stream, washing every stain away to render it, a fit offering, to the sea.

AMA

But my son——

VINAYAKA

Again I bid you not to speak of him. Lay yourself once more in a father's arms, my child, like a babe fresh from the womb of Oblivion, your second mother.

AMA

To me the world has become a shadow. Your words I hear, but cannot take to heart. Leave me, father, leave me alone! Do not try to bind me with your love, for its bands are red with my husband's blood.

VINAYAKA

Alas! no flower ever returns to the parent branch it dropped from. How can you call him *husband* who forcibly snatched you from Jivaji to whom you had been sacredly affianced? I shall never forget that night! In the wedding hall we sat anxiously expecting the bridegroom, for the auspicious hour was dwindling away. Then in the distance appeared the glare of torches, and bridal strains came floating up the air. We shouted for joy: women blew their conch−shells. A procession of palanquins entered the courtyard: but while we were asking, “Where is Jivaji?” armed men burst out of the litters like a storm, and bore you off before we knew what had happened. Shortly after, Jivaji came to tell us he had been waylaid and captured by a Mussulman noble of the Vijapur court. That night Jivaji and I touched the nuptial fire and swore bloody death to this villain. After waiting long, we have been freed from our solemn pledge to−night; and the spirit of Jivaji, who lost his life in this battle, lawfully claims you for wife.

AMA

Father, it may be that I have disgraced the rites of your house, but my honour is unsullied; I loved him to whom I bore a son. I remember the night when I received two secret messages, one from you, one from my mother; yours said: “I send you the knife; kill him!” My mother's: “I send you the poison; end your life!” Had unholy force dishonoured me, your double bidding had been obeyed. But my body was yielded only after love had given *me*—love all the greater, all the purer, in that it overcame the hereditary recoil of our blood from the Mussulman.

Enter RAMA, AMA'S *mother*

AMA

Mother mine, I had not hoped to see you again. Let me take dust from your feet.

RAMA

Touch me not with impure hands!

AMA

I am as pure as yourself.

RAMA

To whom have you surrendered your honour?

AMA

To my husband.

RAMA

Husband? A Mussulman the husband of a Brahmin woman?

AMA

I do not merit contempt: I am proud to say I never despised my husband though a Mussulman. If Paradise will reward your devotion to your husband, then the same Paradise waits for your daughter, who has been as true a wife.

RAMA

Are you indeed a true wife?

AMA

Yes.

RAMA

Do you know how to die without flinching?

AMA

I do.

RAMA

Then let the funeral fire be lighted for you! See, there lies the body of your husband.

AMA

Jivaji?

RAMA

Yes, Jivaji. He was your husband by plighted troth. The baffled fire of the nuptial God has raged into the hungry fire of death, and the interrupted wedding shall be completed now.

VINAYAKA

Do not listen, my child. Go back to your son, to your own nest darkened with sorrow. My duty has been performed to its extreme cruel end, and nothing now remains for you to do.—Wife, your grief is fruitless. Were the branch dead which was violently snapped from our tree, I should give it to the fire. But it has sent living roots into a new soil and is bearing flowers and fruits. Allow her, without regret, to obey the laws of those among whom she has loved. Come, wife, it is time we cut all worldly ties and spent our remainder lives in the seclusion of some peaceful pilgrim shrine.

RAMA

I am ready: but first must tread into dust every sprout of sin and shame that has sprung from the soil of our life. A daughter's infamy stains her mother's honour. That black shame shall feed glowing fire to−night, and raise a true wife's memorial over the ashes of my daughter.

AMA

Mother, if by force you unite me in death with one who was not my husband, then will you bring a curse upon yourself for desecrating the shrine of the Eternal Lord of Death.

RAMA

Soldiers, light the fire; surround the woman!

AMA

Father!

VINAYAKA

Do not fear. Alas, my child, that you should ever have to call your father to save you from your mother's hands!

AMA

Father!

VINAYAKA

Come to me, my darling child! Mere vanity are these man−made laws, splashing like spray against the rock of heaven's ordinance. Bring your son to me, and we will live together, my daughter. A father's love, like God's rain, does not judge but is poured forth from an abounding source.

RAMA

Where would you go? Turn back!—Soldiers, stand firm in your loyalty to your master Jivaji! do your last sacred duty by him!

AMA

Father!

VINAYAKA

Free her, soldiers! She is my daughter.

SOLDIERS

She is the widow of our master.

VINAYAKA

Her husband, though a Mussulman, was staunch in his own faith.

RAMA

Soldiers, keep this old man under control!

AMA

I defy you, mother!—You, soldiers, I defy!—for through death and love I win to freedom.

30

A painter was selling pictures at the fair; followed by servants, there passed the son of a minister who in youth had cheated this painter's father so that he had died of a broken heart.

The boy lingered before the pictures and chose one for himself. The painter flung a cloth over it and said he would not sell it.

After this the boy pined heart−sick till his father came and offered a large price. But the painter kept the picture unsold on his shop−wall and grimly sat before it, saying to himself, “This is my revenge.”

The sole form this painter's worship took was to trace an image of his god every morning.

And now he felt these pictures grow daily more different from those he used to paint.

This troubled him, and he sought in vain for an explanation till one day he started up from work in horror, the eyes of the god he had just drawn were those of the minister, and so were the lips.

He tore up the picture, crying, “My revenge has returned on my head!”

31

The General came before the silent and angry King and saluting him said: “The village is punished, the men are stricken to dust, and the women cower in their unlit homes afraid to weep aloud.”

The High Priest stood up and blessed the King and cried: “God's mercy is ever upon you.”

The Clown, when he heard this, burst out laughing and startled the court. The King's frown darkened.

“The honour of the throne,” said the minister, “is upheld by the King's prowess and the blessing of Almighty God.”

Louder laughed the Clown, and the King growled,—“Unseemly mirth!”

“God has showered many blessings upon your head,” said the Clown; “the one he bestowed on me was the gift of laughter.”

“This gift will cost you your life,” said the King, gripping his sword with his right hand.

Yet the Clown stood up and laughed till he laughed no more.

A shadow of dread fell upon the Court, for they heard that laughter echoing in the depth of God's silence.

32

THE MOTHER'S PRAYER

THE MOTHER'S PRAYER

Prince Duryodhana, the son of the blind Kaurava King Dhritarashtra, and of Queen Gandhari, has played with his cousins the Pandava Kings for their kingdom, and won it by fraud.

DHRITARASHTRA

You have compassed your end.

DURYODHANA

Success is mine!

DHRITARASHTRA

Are you happy?

DURYODHANA

I am victorious.

DHRITARASHTRA

I ask you again, what happiness have you in winning the undivided kingdom?

DURYODHANA

Sire, a Kshatriya thirsts not after happiness but victory, that fiery wine pressed from seething jealousy. Wretchedly happy we were, like those inglorious stains that lie idly on the breast of the moon, when we lived in peace under the friendly dominance of our cousins. Then these Pandavas milked the world of its wealth, and allowed us a share, in brotherly tolerance. Now that they own defeat and expect banishment, I am no longer happy but exultant.

DHRITARASHTRA

Wretch, you forget that both Pandavas and Kauravas have the same forefathers.

DURYODHANA

It was difficult to forget that, and therefore our inequalities rankled in my heart. At midnight the moon is never jealous of the noonday sun. But the struggle to share one horizon between both orbs cannot last forever. Thank heaven, that struggle is over, and we have at last won solitude in glory.

DHRITARASHTRA

The mean jealousy!

DURYODHANA

Jealousy is never mean—it is in the essence of greatness. Grass can grow in crowded amity, not giant trees. Stars live in clusters, but the sun and moon are lonely in their splendour. The pale moon of the Pandavas sets behind the forest shadows, leaving the new−risen sun of the Kauravas to rejoice.

DHRITARASHTRA

But right has been defeated.

DURYODHANA

Right for rulers is not what is right in the eyes of the people. The people thrive by comradeship: but for a king, equals are enemies. They are obstacles ahead, they are terrors from behind. There is no place for brothers or friends in a king's polity; its one solid foundation is conquest.

DHRITARASHTRA

I refuse to call a conquest what was won by fraud in gambling.

DURYODHANA

A man is not shamed by refusing to challenge a tiger on equal terms with teeth and nails. Our weapons are those proper for success, not for suicide. Father, I am proud of the result and disdain regret for the means.

DHRITARASHTRA

But justice——

DURYODHANA

Fools alone dream of justice—success is not yet theirs: but those born to rule rely on power, merciless and unhampered with scruples.

DHRITARASHTRA

Your success will bring down on you a loud and angry flood of detraction.

DURYODHANA

The people will take amazingly little time to learn that Duryodhana is king and has power to crush calumny under foot.

DHRITARASHTRA

Calumny dies of weariness dancing on tongue−tips. Do not drive it into the heart to gather strength.

DURYODHANA

Unuttered defamation does not touch a king's dignity. I care not if love is refused us, but insolence shall not be borne. Love depends upon the will of the giver, and the poorest of the poor can indulge in such generosity. Let

them squander it on their pet cats, tame dogs, and our good cousins the Pandavas. I shall never envy them. Fear is the tribute I claim for my royal throne. Father, only too leniently you lent your ear to those who slandered your sons: but if you intend still to allow those pious friends of yours to revel in shrill denunciation at the expense of your children, let us exchange our kingdom for the exile of our cousins, and go to the wilderness, where happily friends are never cheap!

DHRITARASHTRA

Could the pious warnings of my friends lessen my love for my sons, then we might be saved. But I have dipped my hands in the mire of your infamy and lost my sense of goodness. For your sakes I have heedlessly set fire to the ancient forest of our royal lineage—so dire is my love. Clasped breast to breast, we, like a double meteor, are blindly plunging into ruin. Therefore doubt not my love; relax not your embrace till the brink of annihilation be reached. Beat your drums of victory, lift your banner of triumph. In this mad riot of exultant evil, brothers and friends will disperse till nothing remain save the doomed father, the doomed son and God's curse.

Enter an Attendant

Sire, Queen Gandhari asks for audience.

DHRITARASHTRA

I await her.

DURYODHANA

Let me take my leave. [*Exit.*

DHRITARASHTRA

Fly! For you cannot bear the fire of your mother's presence.

Enter QUEEN GANDHARI, *the mother of* DURYODHANA

GANDHARI

At your feet I crave a boon.

DHRITARASHTRA

Speak, your wish is fulfilled.

GANDHARI

The time has come to renounce him.

DHRITARASHTRA

Whom, my queen?

GANDHARI

Duryodhana!

DHRITARASHTRA

Our own son, Duryodhana?

GANDHARI

Yes!

DHRITARASHTRA

This is a terrible boon for you, his mother, to crave!

GANDHARI

The fathers of the Kauravas, who are in Paradise, join me in beseeching you.

DHRITARASHTRA

The divine Judge will punish him who has broken His laws. But I am his father.

GANDHARI

Am I not his mother? Have I not carried him under my throbbing heart? Yes, I ask you to renounce Duryodhana the unrighteous.

DHRITARASHTRA

What will remain to us after that?

GANDHARI

God's blessing.

DHRITARASHTRA

And what will that bring us?

GANDHARI

New afflictions. Pleasure in our son's presence, pride in a new kingdom, and shame at knowing both purchased by wrong done or connived at, like thorns dragged two ways, would lacerate our bosoms. The Pandavas are too proud ever to accept back from us the lands which they have relinquished; therefore it is only meet that we draw some great sorrow down on our heads so as to deprive that unmerited reward of its sting.

DHRITARASHTRA

Queen, you inflict fresh pain on a heart already rent.

GANDHARI

Sire, the punishment imposed on our son will be more ours than his. A judge callous to the pain that he inflicts loses the right to judge. And if you spare your son to save yourself pain, then all the culprits ever punished by your hands will cry before God's throne for vengeance,—had they not also their fathers?

DHRITARASHTRA

No more of this, Queen, I pray you. Our son is abandoned of God: that is why I cannot give him up. To save him is no longer in my power, and therefore my consolation is to share his guilt and tread the path of destruction, his solitary companion. What is done is done; let follow what must follow! [*Exit.*

GANDHARI

Be calm, my heart, and patiently await God's judgment. Oblivious night wears on, the morning of reckoning nears, I hear the thundering roar of its chariot. Woman, bow your head down to the dust! and as a sacrifice fling your heart under those wheels! Darkness will shroud the sky, earth will tremble, wailing will rend the air and then comes the silent and cruel end,—that terrible peace, that great forgetting, and awful extinction of hatred—the supreme deliverance rising from the fire of death.

33

Fiercely they rend in pieces the carpet woven during ages of prayer for the welcome of the world's best hope.

The great preparations of love lie a heap of shreds, and there is nothing on the ruined altar to remind the mad crowd that their god was to have come. In a fury of passion they seem to have burnt their future to cinders, and with it the season of their bloom.

The air is harsh with the cry, “Victory to the Brute!” The children look haggard and aged; they whisper to one another that time revolves but never advances, that we are goaded to run but have nothing to reach, that creation is like a blind man's groping.

I said to myself, “Cease thy singing. Song is for one who is to come, the struggle without an end is for things that are.”

The road, that ever lies along like some one with ear to the ground listening for footsteps, to−day gleans no hint of coming guest, nothing of the house at its far end.

My lute said, “Trample me in the dust.”

I looked at the dust by the roadside. There was a tiny flower among thorns. And I cried, “The world's hope is not dead!”

The sky stooped over the horizon to whisper to the earth, and a hush of expectation filled the air. I saw the palm leaves clapping their hands to the beat of inaudible music, and the moon exchanged glances with the glistening silence of the lake.

The road said to me, “Fear nothing!” and my lute said, “Lend me thy songs!”

34. TRANSLATIONS. BAUL SONGS

[1]

[Footnote 1: The Bauls are a sect of religious mendicants in Bengal, unlettered and unconventional, whose songs are loved and sung by the people. The literal meaning of the word “Baul” is “the Mad.”]

1

This longing to meet in the play of love, my Lover, is not only mine but yours.

Your lips can smile, your flute make music, only through delight in my love; therefore you are importunate even as I.

2

I sit here on the road; do not ask me to walk further.

If your love can be complete without mine let me turn back from seeking you.

I refuse to beg a sight of you if you do not feel my need.

I am blind with market dust and mid−day glare, and so wait, in hopes that your heart, my heart's lover, will send you to find me.

3

I am poured forth in living notes of joy and sorrow by your breath.

Mornings and evenings in summer and in rains, I am fashioned to music.

Should I be wholly spent in some flight of song, I shall not grieve, the tune is so dear to me.

4

My heart is a flute he has played on. If ever it fall into other hands let him fling it away.

My lover's flute is dear to him, therefore if to−day alien breath have entered it and sounded strange notes, let him break it to pieces and strew the dust with them.

5

In love the aim is neither pain nor pleasure but love only.

While free love binds, division destroys it, for love is what unites.

Love is lit from love as fire from fire, but whence came the first flame?

In your being it leaps under the rod of pain.

Then, when the hidden fire flames forth, the in and the out are one and all barriers fall in ashes.

Let the pain glow fiercely, burst from the heart and beat back darkness, need you be afraid?

The poet says, “Who can buy love without paying its price? When you fail to give yourself you make the whole world miserly.”

6

Eyes see only dust and earth, but feel with the heart, and know pure joy.

The delights blossom on all sides in every form, but where is your heart's thread to make a wreath of them?

My master's flute sounds through all things, drawing me out of my lodgings wherever they may be, and while I listen I know that every step I take is in my master's house.

For he is the sea, he is the river that leads to the sea, and he is the landing−place.

7

Strange ways has my guest.

He comes at times when I am unprepared, yet how can I refuse him?

I watch all night with lighted lamp; he stays away; when the light goes out and the room is bare he comes claiming his seat, and can I keep him waiting?

I laugh and make merry with friends, then suddenly I start up, for lo! he passes me by in sorrow, and I know my mirth was vain.

I have often seen a smile in his eyes when my heart ached, then I knew my sorrow was not real.

Yet I never complain when I do not understand him.

8

I am the boat, you are the sea, and also the boatman.

Though you never make the shore, though you let me sink, why should I be foolish and afraid?

Is reaching the shore a greater prize than losing myself with you?

If you are only the haven, as they say, then what is the sea?

Let it surge and toss me on its waves, I shall be content.

I live in you whatever and however you appear. Save me or kill me as you wish, only never leave me in other hands.

9

Make way, O bud, make way, burst open thy heart and make way.

The opening spirit has overtaken thee, canst thou remain a bud any longer?

III

1

Come, Spring, reckless lover of the earth, make the forest's heart pant for utterance!

Come in gusts of disquiet where flowers break open and jostle the new leaves!

Burst, like a rebellion of light, through the night's vigil, through the lake's dark dumbness, through the dungeon under the dust, proclaiming freedom to the shackled seeds!

Like the laughter of lightning, like the shout of a storm, break into the midst of the noisy town; free stifled word and unconscious effort, reinforce our flagging fight, and conquer death!

2

I have looked on this picture in many a month of March when the mustard is in bloom—this lazy line of the water and the grey of the sand beyond, the rough path along the river−bank carrying the comradeship of the field into the heart of the village.

I have tried to capture in rhyme the idle whistle of the wind, the beat of the oar−strokes from a passing boat.

I have wondered in my mind how simply it stands before me, this great world: with what fond and familiar ease it fills my heart, this encounter with the Eternal Stranger.

3

The ferry−boat plies between the two villages facing each other across the narrow stream.

The water is neither wide nor deep—a mere break in the path that enhances the small adventures of daily life, like a break in the words of a song across which the tune gleefully streams.

While the towers of wealth rise high and crash to ruin, these villages talk to each other across the garrulous stream, and the ferry−boat plies between them, age after age, from seed−time to harvest.

4

In the evening after they have brought their cattle home, they sit on the grass before their huts to know that you are among them unseen, to repeat in their songs the name which they have fondly given you.

While kings' crowns shine and disappear like falling stars, around village huts your name rises through the still night from the simple hearts of your lovers whose names are unrecorded.

5

In Baby's world, the trees shake their leaves at him, murmuring verses in an ancient tongue that dates from before the age of meaning, and the moon feigns to be of his own age—the solitary baby of night.

In the world of the old, flowers dutifully blush at the make−believe of faery legends, and broken dolls confess that they are made of clay.

6

My world, when I was a child, you were a little girl−neighbour, a loving timid stranger.

Then you grew bold and talked to me across the fence, offering me toys and flowers and shells.

Next you coaxed me away from my work, you tempted me into the land of the dusk or the weedy corner of some garden in mid−day loneliness.

At length you told me stories about bygone times, with which the present ever longs to meet so as to be rescued from its prison in the moment.

7

How often, great Earth, have I felt my being yearn to flow over you, sharing in the happiness of each green blade that raises its signal banner in answer to the beckoning blue of the sky!

I feel as if I had belonged to you ages before I was born. That is why, in the days when the autumn light shimmers on the mellowing ears of rice, I seem to remember a past when my mind was everywhere, and even to hear voices as of playfellows echoing from the remote and deeply veiled past.

When, in the evening, the cattle return to their folds, raising dust from the meadow paths, as the moon rises higher than the smoke ascending from the village huts, I feel sad as for some great separation that happened in the first morning of existence.

8

My mind still buzzed with the cares of a busy day; I sat on without noting how twilight was deepening into dark. Suddenly light stirred across the gloom and touched me as with a finger.

I lifted my head and met the gaze of the full moon widened in wonder like a child's. It held my eyes for long, and I felt as though a love−letter had been secretly dropped in at my window. And ever since my heart is breaking to write for answer something fragrant as Night's unseen flowers—great as her declaration spelt out in nameless stars.

9

The clouds thicken till the morning light seems like a bedraggled fringe to the rainy night.

A little girl stands at her window, still as a rainbow at the gate of a broken−down storm.

She is my neighbour, and has come upon the earth like some god's rebellious laughter. Her mother in anger calls her incorrigible; her father smiles and calls her mad.

She is like a runaway waterfall leaping over boulders, like the topmost bamboo twig rustling in the restless wind.

She stands at her window looking out into the sky.

Her sister comes to say, “Mother calls you.” She shakes her head.

Her little brother with his toy boat comes and tries to pull her off to play; she snatches her hand from his. The boy persists and she gives him a slap on the back.

The first great voice was the voice of wind and water in the beginning of earth's creation.

That ancient cry of nature—her dumb call to unborn life—has reached this child's heart and leads it out alone beyond the fence of our times: so there she stands, possessed by eternity!

10

The kingfisher sits still on the prow of an empty boat, while in the shallow margin of the stream a buffalo lies tranquilly blissful, its eyes half closed to savour the luxury of cool mud.

Undismayed by the barking of the village cur, the cow browses on the bank, followed by a hopping group of *saliks* hunting moths.

I sit in the tamarind grove, where the cries of dumb life congregate—the cattle's lowing, the sparrows' chatter, the shrill scream of a kite overhead, the crickets' chirp, and the splash of a fish in the water.

I peep into the primeval nursery of life, where the mother Earth thrills at the first living clutch near her breast.

11

At the sleepy village the noon was still like a sunny midnight when my holidays came to their end.

My little girl of four had followed me all the morning from room to room, watching my preparations in grave silence, till, wearied, she sat by the doorpost strangely quiet, murmuring to herself, “Father must not go!”

This was the meal hour, when sleep daily overcame her, but her mother had forgotten her and the child was too unhappy to complain.

At last, when I stretched out my arms to her to say farewell, she never moved, but sadly looking at me said, “Father, you must not go!”

And it amused me to tears to think how this little child dared to fight the giant world of necessity with no other resource than those few words, “Father, you must not go!”

12

Take your holiday, my boy; there are the blue sky and the bare field, the barn and the ruined temple under the ancient tamarind.

My holiday must be taken through yours, finding light in the dance of your eyes, music in your noisy shouts.

To you autumn brings the true holiday freedom: to me it brings the impossibility of work; for lo! you burst into my room.

Yes, my holiday is an endless freedom for love to disturb me.

13

In the evening my little daughter heard a call from her companions below the window.

She timidly went down the dark stairs holding a lamp in her hand, shielding it behind her veil.

I was sitting on my terrace in the star−lit night of March, when at a sudden cry I ran to see.

Her lamp had gone out in the dark spiral staircase. I asked, “Child, why did you cry?”

From below she answered in distress, “Father, I have lost myself!”

When I came back to the terrace under the star−lit night of March, I looked at the sky, and it seemed that a child was walking there treasuring many lamps behind her veils.

If their light went out, she would suddenly stop and a cry would sound from sky to sky, “Father, I have lost myself!”

14

The evening stood bewildered among street lamps, its gold tarnished by the city dust.

A woman, gaudily decked and painted, leant over the rail of her balcony, a living fire waiting for its moths.

Suddenly an eddy was formed in the road round a street−boy crushed under the wheels of a carriage, and the woman on the balcony fell to the floor screaming in agony, stricken with the grief of the great white−robed Mother who sits in the world's inner shrine.

15

I remember the scene on the barren heath—a girl sat alone on the grass before the gipsy camp, braiding her hair in the afternoon shade.

Her little dog jumped and barked at her busy hands, as though her employment had no importance.

In vain did she rebuke it, calling it “a pest,” saying she was tired of its perpetual silliness.

She struck it on the nose with her reproving forefinger, which only seemed to delight it the more.

She looked menacingly grave for a few moments, to warn it of impending doom; and then, letting her hair fall, quickly snatched it up in her arms, laughed, and pressed it to her heart.

16

He is tall and lean, withered to the bone with long repeated fever, like a dead tree unable to draw a single drop of sap from anywhere.

In despairing patience, his mother carries him like a child into the sun, where he sits by the roadside in the shortening shadows of each forenoon.

The world passes by—a woman to fetch water, a herd−boy with cattle to pasture, a laden cart to the distant market—and the mother hopes that some least stir of life may touch the awful torpor of her dying son.

17

If the ragged villager, trudging home from the market, could suddenly be lifted to the crest of a distant age, men would stop in their work and shout and run to him in delight.

For they would no longer whittle down the man into the peasant, but find him full of the mystery and spirit of his age.

Even his poverty and pain would grow great, released from the shallow insult of the present, and the paltry things in his basket would acquire pathetic dignity.

18

With the morning he came out to walk a road shaded by a file of deodars, that coiled the hill round like importunate love.

He held the first letter from his newly wedded wife in their village home, begging him to come to her, and come soon.

The touch of an absent hand haunted him as he walked, and the air seemed to take up the cry of the letter: “Love, my love, my sky is brimming with tears!”

He asked himself in wonder, “How do I deserve this?”

The sun suddenly appeared over the rim of the blue hills, and four girls from a foreign shore came with swift strides, talking loud and followed by a barking dog.

The two elder turned away to conceal their amusement at something strange in his insignificance, and the younger ones pushed each other, laughed aloud, and ran off in exuberant mirth.

He stopped and his head sank. Then he suddenly felt his letter, opened and read it again.

19

The day came for the image from the temple to be drawn round the holy town in its chariot.

The Queen said to the King, “Let us go and attend the festival.”

Only one man out of the whole household did not join in the pilgrimage. His work was to collect stalks of spear−grass to make brooms for the King's house.

The chief of the servants said in pity to him, “You may come with us.”

He bowed his head, saying, “It cannot be.”

The man dwelt by the road along which the King's followers had to pass. And when the Minister's elephant reached this spot, he called to him and said, “Come with us and see the God ride in his chariot!”

“I dare not seek God after the King's fashion,” said the man.

“How should you ever have such luck again as to see the God in his chariot?” asked the Minister.

“When God himself comes to my door,” answered the man.

The Minister laughed loud and said, “Fool! 'When God comes to your door!' yet a King must travel to see him!”

“Who except God visits the poor?” said the man.

20

Days were drawing out as the winter ended, and, in the sun, my dog played in his wild way with the pet deer.

The crowd going to the market gathered by the fence, and laughed to see the love of these playmates struggle with languages so dissimilar.

The spring was in the air, and the young leaves fluttered like flames. A gleam danced in the deer's dark eyes when she started, bent her neck at the movement of her own shadow, or raised her ears to listen to some whisper in the wind.

The message comes floating with the errant breeze, with the rustle and glimmer abroad in the April sky. It sings of the first ache of youth in the world, when the first flower broke from the bud, and love went forth seeking that which it knew not, leaving all it had known.

And one afternoon, when among the *amlak* trees the shadow grew grave and sweet with the furtive caress of light, the deer set off to run like a meteor in love with death.

It grew dark, and lamps were lighted in the house; the stars came out and night was upon the fields, but the deer never came back.

My dog ran up to me whining, questioning me with his piteous eyes which seemed to say, “I do not understand!”

But who does ever understand?

21

Our Lane is tortuous, as if, ages ago, she started in quest of her goal, vacillated right and left, and remained bewildered for ever.

Above in the air, between her buildings, hangs like a ribbon a strip torn out of space: she calls it her sister of the blue town.

She sees the sun only for a few moments at mid−day, and asks herself in wise doubt, “Is it real?”

In June rain sometimes shades her band of daylight as with pencil hatchings. The path grows slippery with mud, and umbrellas collide. Sudden jets of water from spouts overhead splash on her startled pavement. In her dismay, she takes it for the jest of an unmannerly scheme of creation.

The spring breeze, gone astray in her coil of contortions, stumbles like a drunken vagabond against angle and corner, filling the dusty air with scraps of paper and rag. “What fury of foolishness! Are the Gods gone mad?” she exclaims in indignation.

But the daily refuse from the houses on both sides—scales of fish mixed with ashes, vegetable peelings, rotten fruit, and dead rats—never rouse her to question, “Why should these things be?”

She accepts every stone of her paving. But from between their chinks sometimes a blade of grass peeps up. That baffles her. How can solid facts permit such intrusion?

On a morning when at the touch of autumn light her houses wake up into beauty from their foul dreams, she whispers to herself, “There is a limitless wonder somewhere beyond these buildings.”

But the hours pass on; the households are astir; the maid strolls back from the market, swinging her right arm and with the left clasping the basket of provisions to her side; the air grows thick with the smell and smoke of kitchens. It again becomes clear to our Lane that the real and normal consist solely of herself, her houses, and their muck−heaps.

22

The house, lingering on after its wealth has vanished, stands by the wayside like a madman with a patched rag over his back.

Day after day scars it with spiteful scratches, and rainy months leave their fantastic signatures on its bared bricks.

In a deserted upper room one of a pair of doors has fallen from rusty hinges; and the other, widowed, bangs day and night to the fitful gusts.

One night the sound of women wailing came from that house. They mourned the death of the last son of the family, a boy of eighteen, who earned his living by playing the part of the heroine in a travelling theatre.

A few days more and the house became silent, and all the doors were locked.

Only on the north side in the upper room that desolate door would neither drop off to its rest nor be shut, but swung to and fro in the wind like a self−torturing soul.

After a time children's voices echo once more through that house. Over the balcony−rail women's clothes are hung in the sun, a bird whistles from a covered cage, and a boy plays with his kite on the terrace.

A tenant has come to occupy a few rooms. He earns little and has many children. The tired mother beats them and they roll on the floor and shriek.

A maid−servant of forty drudges through the day, quarrels with her mistress, threatens to, but never leaves.

Every day some small repairs are done. Paper is pasted in place of missing panes; gaps in the railings are made good with split bamboo; an empty box keeps the boltless gate shut; old stains vaguely show through new whitewash on the walls.

The magnificence of wealth had found a fitting memorial in gaunt desolation; but, lacking sufficient means, they try to hide this with dubious devices, and its dignity is outraged.

They have overlooked the deserted room on the north side. And its forlorn door still bangs in the wind, like Despair beating her breast.

23

In the depths of the forest the ascetic practised penance with fast−closed eyes; he intended to deserve Paradise.

But the girl who gathered twigs brought him fruits in her skirt, and water from the stream in cups made of leaves.

The days went on, and his penance grew harsher till the fruits remained untasted, the water untouched: and the girl who gathered twigs was sad.

The Lord of Paradise heard that a man had dared to aspire to be as the Gods. Time after time he had fought the Titans, who were his peers, and kept them out of his kingdom; yet he feared a man whose power was that of suffering.

But he knew the ways of mortals, and he planned a temptation to decoy this creature of dust away from his adventure.

A breath from Paradise kissed the limbs of the girl who gathered twigs, and her youth ached with a sudden rapture of beauty, and her thoughts hummed like the bees of a rifled hive.

The time came when the ascetic should leave the forest for a mountain cave, to complete the rigour of his penance.

When he opened his eyes in order to start on this journey, the girl appeared to him like a verse familiar, yet forgotten, and which an added melody made strange. The ascetic rose from his seat and told her that it was time he left the forest.

“But why rob me of my chance to serve you?” she asked with tears in her eyes.

He sat down again, thought for long, and remained on where he was.

That night remorse kept the girl awake. She began to dread her power and hate her triumph, yet her mind tossed on the waves of turbulent delight.

In the morning she came and saluted the ascetic and asked his blessing, saying she must leave him.

He gazed on her face in silence, then said, “Go, and may your wish be fulfilled.”

For years he sat alone till his penance was complete.

The Lord of the Immortals came down to tell him that he had won Paradise.

“I no longer need it,” said he.

The God asked him what greater reward he desired.

“I want the girl who gathers twigs.”

24

They said that Kabir, the weaver, was favoured of God, and the crowd flocked round him for medicine and miracles. But he was troubled; his low birth had hitherto endowed him with a most precious obscurity to sweeten with songs and with the presence of his God. He prayed that it might be restored.

Envious of the repute of this outcast, the priests leagued themselves with a harlot to disgrace him. Kabir came to the market to sell cloths from his loom; when the woman grasped his hand, blaming him for being faithless, and followed him to his house, saying she would not be forsaken, Kabir said to himself, “God answers prayers in his own way.”

Soon the woman felt a shiver of fear and fell on her knees and cried, “Save me from my sin!” To which he said, “Open your life to God's light!”

Kabir worked at his loom and sang, and his songs washed the stains from that woman's heart, and by way of return found a home in her sweet voice.

One day the King, in a fit of caprice, sent a message to Kabir to come and sing before him. The weaver shook his head: but the messenger dared not leave his door till his master's errand was fulfilled.

The King and his courtiers started at the sight of Kabir when he entered the hall. For he was not alone, the woman followed him. Some smiled, some frowned, and the King's face darkened at the beggar's pride and shamelessness.

Kabir came back to his house disgraced, the woman fell at his feet crying, “Why accept such dishonour for my sake, master? Suffer me to go back to my infamy!”

Kabir said, “I dare not turn my God away when he comes branded with insult.”

25

SOMAKA AND RITVIK

SOMAKA AND RITVIK

The shade of KING SOMAKA, *faring to Heaven in a chariot, passes other shades by the roadside, among them that of* RITVIK, *his former high−priest*.

A VOICE

Where would you go, King?

SOMAKA

Whose voice is that? This turbid air is like suffocation to the eyes; I cannot see.

THE VOICE

Come down, King! Come down from that chariot bound for Heaven.

SOMAKA

Who are you?

THE VOICE

I am Ritvik, who in my earthly life was your preceptor and the chief priest of your house.

SOMAKA

Master, all the tears of the world seem to have become vapour to create this realm of vagueness. What make you here?

SHADES

This hell lies hard by the road to Heaven, whence lights glimmer dimly, only to prove unapproachable. Day and night we listen to the heavenly chariot rumbling by with travellers for that region of bliss; it drives sleep from our eyes and forces them to watch in fruitless jealousy. Far below us earth's old forests rustle and her seas chant the primal hymn of creation: they sound like the wail of a memory that wanders void space in vain.

RITVIK

Come down, King!

SHADES

Stop a few moments among us. The earth's tears still cling about you, like dew on freshly culled flowers. You have brought with you the mingled odours of meadow and forest; reminiscence of children, women, and comrades; something too of the ineffable music of the seasons.

SOMAKA

Master, why are you doomed to live in this muffled stagnant world?

RITVIK

I offered up your son in the sacrificial fire: *that* sin has lodged my soul in this obscurity.

SHADES

King, tell us the story, we implore you; the recital of crime can still bring life's fire into our torpor.

SOMAKA

I was named Somaka, the King of Videha. After sacrificing at innumerable shrines weary year on year, a son was born to my house in my old age, love for whom, like a sudden untimely flood, swept consideration for everything else from my life. He hid me completely, as a lotus hides its stem. The neglected duties of a king piled up in shame before my throne. One day, in my audience hall, I heard my child cry from his mother's room, and instantly rushed away, vacating my throne.

RITVIK

Just then, it chanced, I entered the hall to give him my daily benediction; in blind haste he brushed me aside and enkindled my anger. When later he came back, shame−faced, I asked him: “King, what desperate alarm could draw you at the busiest hour of the day to the women's apartments, so as to desert your dignity and duty—ambassadors come from friendly courts, the aggrieved who ask for justice, your ministers waiting to discuss matters of grave import? and even lead you to slight a Brahmin's blessing?”

SOMAKA

At first my heart flamed with anger; the next moment I trampled it down like the raised head of a snake and meekly replied: “Having only one child, I have lost my peace of mind. Forgive me this once, and I promise that in future the father's infatuation shall never usurp the King.”

RITVIK

But my heart was bitter with resentment, and I said, “If you must be delivered from the curse of having only one child, I can show you the way. But so hard is it that I feel certain you will fail to follow it.” This galled the King's pride and he stood up and exclaimed, “I swear, by all that is sacred, as a Kshatriya and a King, I will not shrink, but perform whatever you may ask, however hard.” “Then listen,” said I. “Light a sacrificial fire, offer up your son: the smoke that rises will bring you progeny, as the clouds bring rain.” The King bowed his head upon his breast and remained silent: the courtiers shouted their horror, the Brahmins clapped their hands over their ears, crying, “Sin it is both to utter and listen to such words.” After some moments of bewildered dismay the King calmly said, “I will abide by my promise.” The day came, the fire was lit, the town was emptied of its people, the child was called for; but the attendants refused to obey, the soldiers rebelliously went off duty, throwing down their arms. Then I, who in my wisdom had soared far above all weakness of heart and to whom emotions were illusory, went myself to the apartment where, with their arms, women fenced the child like a flower surrounded by the menacing branches of a tree. He saw me and stretched out eager hands and struggled to come to me, for he longed to be free from the love that imprisoned him. Crying, “I am come to give you true deliverance,” I snatched him by force from his fainting mother and his nurses wailing in despair. With quivering tongues the fire licked the sky and the King stood beside it, still and silent, like a tree struck dead by lightning. Fascinated by the godlike splendour of the blaze, the child babbled in glee and danced in my arms, impatient to seek an unknown nurse in the free glory of those flames.

SOMAKA

Stop, no more, I pray!

SHADES

Ritvik, your presence is a disgrace to hell itself!

THE CHARIOTEER

This is no place for you, King! nor have you deserved to be forced to listen to this recital of a deed which makes hell shudder in pity.

SOMAKA

Drive off in your chariot!—Brahmin, my place is by you in this hell. The Gods may forget my sin, but can I forget the last look of agonised surprise on my child's face when, for one terrible moment, he realised that his own father had betrayed his trust?

Enter DHARMA, *the Judge of Departed Spirits*

DHARMA

King, Heaven waits for you.

SOMAKA

No, not for me. I killed my own child.

DHARMA

Your sin has been swept away in the fury of pain it caused you.

RITVIK

No, King, you must never go to Heaven alone, and thus create a second hell for me, to burn both with fire and with hatred of you! Stay here!

SOMAKA

I will stay.

SHADES

And crown the despair and inglorious suffering of hell with the triumph of a soul!

26

The man had no useful work, only vagaries of various kinds.

Therefore it surprised him to find himself in Paradise after a life spent perfecting trifles.

Now the guide had taken him by mistake to the wrong Paradise—one meant only for good, busy souls.

In this Paradise, our man saunters along the road only to obstruct the rush of business.

He stands aside from the path and is warned that he tramples on sown seed. Pushed, he starts up: hustled, he moves on.

A very busy girl comes to fetch water from the well. Her feet run on the pavement like rapid fingers over harp−strings. Hastily she ties a negligent knot with her hair, and loose locks on her forehead pry into the dark of her eyes.

The man says to her, “Would you lend me your pitcher?”

“My pitcher?” she asks, “to draw water?”

“No, to paint patterns on.”

“I have no time to waste,” the girl retorts in contempt.

Now a busy soul has no chance against one who is supremely idle.

Every day she meets him at the well, and every day he repeats the same request, till at last she yields.

Our man paints the pitcher with curious colours in a mysterious maze of lines.

The girl takes it up, turns it round and asks, “What does it mean?”

“It has no meaning,” he answers.

The girl carries the pitcher home. She holds it up in different lights and tries to con its mystery.

At night she leaves her bed, lights a lamp, and gazes at it from all points of view.

This is the first time she has met with something without meaning.

On the next day the man is again near the well.

The girl asks, “What do you want?”

“To do more work for you.”

“What work?” she enquires.

“Allow me to weave coloured strands into a ribbon to bind your hair.”

“Is there any need?” she asks.

“None whatever,” he allows.

The ribbon is made, and thence−forward she spends a great deal of time over her hair.

The even stretch of well−employed time in that Paradise begins to show irregular rents.

The elders are troubled; they meet in council.

The guide confesses his blunder, saying that he has brought the wrong man to the wrong place.

The wrong man is called. His turban, flaming with colour, shows plainly how great that blunder has been.

The chief of the elders says, “You must go back to the earth.”

The man heaves a sigh of relief: “I am ready.”

The girl with the ribbon round her hair chimes in: “I also!”

For the first time the chief of the elders is faced with a situation which has no sense in it.

27

It is said that in the forest, near the meeting of river and lake, certain fairies live in disguise who are only recognised as fairies after they have flown away.

A Prince went to this forest, and when he came where river met lake he saw a village girl sitting on the bank ruffling the water to make the lilies dance.

He asked her in a whisper, “Tell me, what fairy art thou?”

The girl laughed at the question and the hillsides echoed her mirth.

The Prince thought she was the laughing fairy of the waterfall.

News reached the King that the Prince had married a fairy: he sent horses and men and brought them to his house.

The Queen saw the bride and turned her face away in disgust, the Prince's sister flushed red with annoyance, and the maids asked if that was how fairies dressed.

The Prince whispered, “Hush! my fairy has come to our house in disguise.”

On the day of the yearly festival the Queen said to her son, “Ask your bride not to shame us before our kinsfolk who are coming to see the fairy.”

And the Prince said to his bride, “For my love's sake show thy true self to my people.”

Long she sat silent, then nodded her promise while tears ran down her cheeks.

The full moon shone, the Prince, dressed in a wedding robe, entered his bride's room.

No one was there, nothing but a streak of moonlight from the window aslant the bed.

The kinsfolk crowded in with the King and the Queen, the Prince's sister stood by the door.

All asked, “Where is the fairy bride?”

The Prince answered, “She has vanished for ever to make herself known to you.”

28

KARNA AND KUNTI

KARNA AND KUNTI

The Pandava Queen Kunti before marriage had a son, Karna, who, in manhood, became the commander of the Kaurava host. To hide her shame she abandoned him at birth, and a charioteer, Adhiratha, brought him up as his son.

KARNA

I am Karna, the son of the charioteer, Adhiratha, and I sit here by the bank of holy Ganges to worship the setting sun. Tell me who you are.

KUNTI

I am the woman who first made you acquainted with that light you are worshipping.

KARNA

I do not understand: but your eyes melt my heart as the kiss of the morning sun melts the snow on a mountain−top, and your voice rouses a blind sadness within me of which the cause may well lie beyond the reach of my earliest memory. Tell me, strange woman, what mystery binds my birth to you?

KUNTI

Patience, my son. I will answer when the lids of darkness come down over the prying eyes of day. In the meanwhile, know that I am Kunti.

KARNA

Kunti! The mother of Arjuna?

KUNTI

Yes, indeed, the mother of Arjuna, your antagonist. But do not, therefore, hate me. I still remember the day of the trial of arms in Hastina when you, an unknown boy, boldly stepped into the arena, like the first ray of dawn among the stars of night. Ah! who was that unhappy woman whose eyes kissed your bare, slim body through tears that blessed you, where she sat among the women of the royal household behind the arras? Why, the mother of Arjuna! Then the Brahmin, master of arms, stepped forth and said, “No youth of mean birth may challenge Arjuna to a trial of strength.” You stood speechless, like a thunder−cloud at sunset flashing with an agony of suppressed light. But who was the woman whose heart caught fire from your shame and anger, and flared up in silence? The mother of Arjuna! Praised be Duryodhana, who perceived your worth, and then and there crowned you King of Anga, thus winning the Kauravas a champion. Overwhelmed at this good fortune, Adhiratha, the charioteer, broke through the crowd; you instantly rushed to him and laid your crown at his feet amid the jeering laughter of the Pandavas and their friends. But there was one woman of the Pandava house whose heart glowed with joy at the heroic pride of such humility;—even the mother of Arjuna!

KARNA

But what brings you here alone, Mother of kings?

KUNTI

I have a boon to crave.

KARNA

Command me, and whatever manhood and my honour as a Kshatriya permit shall be offered at your feet.

KUNTI

I have come to take you.

KARNA

Where?

KUNTI

To my breast thirsting for your love, my son.

KARNA

Fortunate mother of five brave kings, where can you find place for me, a small chieftain of lowly descent?

KUNTI

Your place is before all my other sons.

KARNA

But what right have I to take it?

KUNTI

Your own God−given right to your mother's love.

KARNA

The gloom of evening spreads over the earth, silence rests on the water, and your voice leads me back to some primal world of infancy lost in twilit consciousness. However, whether this be dream, or fragment of forgotten reality, come near and place your right hand on my forehead. Rumour runs that I was deserted by my mother. Many a night she has come to me in my slumber, but when I cried: “Open your veil, show me your face!” her figure always vanished. Has this same dream come this evening while I wake? See, yonder the lamps are lighted in your son's tents across the river; and on this side behold the tent−domes of my Kauravas, like the suspended waves of a spell−arrested storm at sea. Before the din of tomorrow's battle, in the awful hush of this field where it must be fought, why should the voice of the mother of my opponent, Arjuna, bring me a message of forgotten motherhood? and why should my name take such music from her tongue as to draw my

heart out to him and his brothers?

KUNTI

Then delay not, my son, come with me!

KARNA

Yes, I will come and never ask question, never doubt. My soul responds to your call; and the struggle for victory and fame and the rage of hatred have suddenly become untrue to me, as the delirious dream of a night in the serenity of the dawn. Tell me whither you mean to lead?

KUNTI

To the other bank of the river, where those lamps burn across the ghastly pallor of the sands.

KARNA

Am I there to find my lost mother for ever?

KUNTI

O my son!

KARNA

Then why did you banish me—a castaway uprooted from my ancestral soil, adrift in a homeless current of indignity? Why set a bottomless chasm between Arjuna and myself, turning the natural attachment of kinship to the dread attraction of hate? You remain speechless. Your shame permeates the vast darkness and sends invisible shivers through my limbs. Leave my question unanswered! Never explain to me what made you rob your son of his mother's love! Only tell me why you have come to−day to call me back to the ruins of a heaven wrecked by your own hands?

KUNTI

I am dogged by a curse more deadly than your reproaches: for, though surrounded by five sons, my heart shrivels like that of a woman deprived of her children. Through the great rent that yawned for my deserted first−born, all my life's pleasures have run to waste. On that accursed day when I belied my motherhood you could not utter a word; to−day your recreant mother implores you for generous words. Let your forgiveness burn her heart like fire and consume its sin.

KARNA

Mother, accept my tears!

KUNTI

I did not come with the hope of winning you back to my arms, but with that of restoring your rights to you. Come and receive, as a king's son, your due among your brothers.

KARNA

I am more truly the son of a charioteer, and do not covet the glory of greater parentage.

KUNTI

Be that as it may, come and win back the kingdom, which is yours by right!

KARNA

Must you, who once refused me a mother's love, tempt me with a kingdom? The quick bond of kindred which you severed at its root is dead, and can never grow again. Shame were mine should I hasten to call the mother of kings mother, and abandon *my* mother in the charioteer's house!

KUNTI

You are great, my son! How God's punishment invisibly grows from a tiny seed to a giant life! The helpless babe disowned by his mother comes back a man through the dark maze of events to smite his brothers!

KARNA

Mother, have no fear! I know for certain that victory awaits the Pandavas. Peaceful and still though this night be, my heart is full of the music of a hopeless venture and baffled end. Ask me not to leave those who are doomed to defeat. Let the Pandavas win the throne, since they must: I remain with the desperate and forlorn. On the night of my birth you left me naked and unnamed to disgrace: leave me once again without pity to the calm expectation of defeat and death!

29

When like a flaming scimitar the hill stream has been sheathed in gloom by the evening, suddenly a flock of birds passes overhead, their loud−laughing wings hurling their flight like an arrow among stars.

It startles a passion for speed in the heart of all motionless things; the hills seem to feel in their bosom the anguish of storm−clouds, and trees long to break their rooted shackles.

For me the flight of these birds has rent a veil of stillness, and reveals an immense flutter in this deep silence.

I see these hills and forests fly across time to the unknown, and darkness thrill into fire as the stars wing by.

I feel in my own being the rush of the sea−crossing bird, cleaving a way beyond the limits of life and death, while the migrant world cries with a myriad voices, “Not here, but somewhere else, in the bosom of the Faraway.”

30

The crowd listens in wonder to Kashi, the young singer, whose voice, like a sword in feats of skill, dances amidst hopeless tangles, cuts them to pieces, and exults.

Among the hearers sits old Rajah Pratap in weary endurance. For his own life had been nourished and encircled by Barajlal's songs, like a happy land which a river laces with beauty. His rainy evenings and the still hours of autumn days spoke to his heart through Barajlal's voice, and his festive nights trimmed their lamps and tinkled their bells to those songs.

When Kashi stopped for rest, Pratap smilingly winked at Barajlal and spoke to him in a whisper, “Master, now let us hear music and not this new−fangled singing, which mimics frisky kittens hunting paralysed mice.”

The old singer with his spotlessly white turban made a deep bow to the assembly and took his seat. His thin fingers struck the strings of his instrument, his eyes closed, and in timid hesitation his song began. The hall was large, his voice feeble, and Pratap shouted “Bravo!” with ostentation, but whispered in his ear, “Just a little louder, friend!”

The crowd was restless; some yawned, some dozed, some complained of the heat. The air of the hall hummed with many−toned inattention, and the song, like a frail boat, tossed upon it in vain till it sank under the hubbub.

Suddenly the old man, stricken at heart, forgot a passage, and his voice groped in agony, like a blind man at a fair for his lost leader. He tried to fill the gap with any strain that came. But the gap still yawned: and the tortured notes refused to serve the need, suddenly changed their tune, and broke into a sob. The master laid his head on his instrument, and in place of his forgotten music, there broke from him the first cry of life that a child brings into the world.

Pratap touched him gently on his shoulder, and said, “Come away, our meeting is elsewhere. I know, my friend, that truth is widowed without love, and beauty dwells not with the many, nor in the moment.”

31

In the youth of the world, Himalaya, you sprang from the rent breast of the earth, and hurled your burning challenges to the sun, hill after hill. Then came the mellow time when you said to yourself, “No more, no further!” and your fiery heart, that raged for the freedom of clouds, found its limits, and stood still to salute the limitless. After this check on your passion, beauty was free to play upon your breast, and trust surrounded you with the joy of flowers and birds.

You sit in your solitude like a great reader, on whose lap lies open some ancient book with its countless pages of stone. What story is written there, I wonder?—is it the eternal wedding of the divine ascetic, Shiva, with Bhavani, the divine love?—the drama of the Terrible wooing the power of the Frail?

32

I feel that my heart will leave its own colour in all your scenes, O Earth, when I bid you farewell. Some notes of mine will be added to your seasons' melody, and my thoughts will breathe unrecognised through the cycle of shadows and sunshine.

In far−distant days summer will come to the lovers' garden, but they will not know that their flowers have borrowed an added beauty from my songs, nor that their love for this world has been deepened by mine.

33

My eyes feel the deep peace of this sky, and there stirs through me what a tree feels when it holds out its leaves like cups to be filled with sunshine.

A thought rises in my mind, like the warm breath from grass in the sun; it mingles with the gurgle of lapping water and the sigh of weary wind in village lanes,—the thought that I have lived along with the whole life of this world and have given to it my own love and sorrows.

34

I ask no reward for the songs I sang you. I shall be content if they live through the night, until Dawn, like a shepherd−maiden, calls away the stars, in alarm at the sun.

But there were moments when you sang your songs to me, and as my pride knows, my Poet, you will ever remember that I listened and lost my heart.

35

In the morning, when the dew glistened upon the grass, you came and gave a push to my swing; but, sweeping from smiles to tears, I did not know you.

Then came April's noon of gorgeous light, and I think you beckoned me to follow you.

But when I sought your face, there passed between us the procession of flowers, and men and women flinging their songs to the south wind.

Daily I passed you unheeded on the road.

But on some days full of the faint smell of oleanders, when the wind was wilful among complaining palm leaves, I would stand before you wondering if you ever had been a stranger to me.

36

The day grew dim. The early evening star faltered near the edge of a grey lonely sky.

I looked back and felt that the road lying behind me was infinitely removed; traced through my life, it had only served for a single journey and was never to be re−travelled.

The long story of my coming hither lies there dumb, in one meandering line of dust stretching from the morning hilltop to the brink of bottomless night.

I sit alone, and wonder if this road is like an instrument waiting to give up the day's lost voices in music when touched by divine fingers at nightfall.

37

Give me the supreme courage of love, this is my prayer—the courage to speak, to do, to suffer at thy will, to leave all things or be left alone. Strengthen me on errands of danger, honour me with pain, and help me climb to that difficult mood which sacrifices daily to thee.

Give me the supreme confidence of love, this is my prayer—the confidence that belongs to life in death, to victory in defeat, to the power hidden in frailest beauty, to that dignity in pain which accepts hurt but disdains to return it.

38. TRANSLATIONS. FROM HINDI SONGS OF JNANADAS

1

Where were your songs, my bird, when you spent your nights in the nest?

Was not all your pleasure stored therein?

What makes you lose your heart to the sky—the sky that is boundless?

Answer

While I rested within bounds I was content. But when I soared into vastness I found I could sing.

2

Messenger, morning brought you, habited in gold.

After sunset your song wore a tune of ascetic grey, and then came night.

Your message was written in bright letters across black.

Why is such splendour about you to lure the heart of one who is nothing?

Answer

Great is the festival hall where you are to be the only guest.

Therefore the letter to you is written from sky to sky, and I, the proud servant, bring the invitation with all ceremony.

3

I had travelled all day and was tired, then I bowed my head towards thy kingly court still far away.

The night deepened, a longing burned in my heart; whatever the words I sang, pain cried through them, for even my songs thirsted. O my Lover, my Beloved, my best in all the world!

When time seemed lost in darkness thy hand dropped its sceptre to take up the lute and strike the uttermost chords; and my heart sang out, O my Lover, my Beloved, my best in all the world!

Ah, who is this whose arms enfold me?

Whatever I have to leave let me leave, and whatever I have to bear let me bear. Only let me walk with thee, O my Lover, my Beloved, my best in all the world!

Descend at whiles from thine audience hall, come down amid joys and sorrows; hide in all forms and delights, in love and in my heart; there sing thy songs, O my Lover, my Beloved, my best in all the world!

THE END

The Gardener

Rabindranath Tagore

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The Gardener

Rabindranath Tagore

This eBook was produced by Chetan Jain.

Translated by the author from the original Bengali

1915

To

W. B. Yeats

Thanks are due to the editor of *Poetry, a Magazine of Verse*, for permission to reprint eight poems in this volume.

Preface

Most of the lyrics of love and life, the translations of which from Bengali are published in this book, were written much earlier than the series of religious poems contained in the book named *Gitanjali*. The translations are not always literal—the originals being sometimes abridged and sometimes paraphrased.

Rabindranath Tagore.

1

SERVANT. Have mercy upon your servant, my queen!

QUEEN. The assembly is over and my servants are all gone. Why do you come at this late hour?

SERVANT. When you have finished with others, that is my time.
I come to ask what remains for your last servant to do.

QUEEN. What can you expect when it is too late?

SERVANT. Make me the gardener of your flower garden.

QUEEN. What folly is this?

SERVANT. I will give up my other work.
I will throw my swords and lances down in the dust. Do not send me to distant courts; do not bid me undertake new conquests. But make me the gardener of your flower garden.

QUEEN. What will your duties be?

SERVANT. The service of your idle days.
I will keep fresh the grassy path where you walk in the morning, where your feet will be greeted with praise at every step by the flowers eager for death.
I will swing you in a swing among the branches of the *saptaparna*, where the early evening moon will struggle to kiss your skirt through the leaves.
I will replenish with scented oil the lamp that burns by your bedside, and decorate your footstool with sandal and saffron paste in wondrous designs.

QUEEN. What will you have for your reward?

SERVANT. To be allowed to hold your little fists like tender lotus−buds and slip flower chains over your wrists; to tinge the soles of your feet with the red juice of *ashoka* petals and kiss away the speck of dust that may chance to linger there.

QUEEN. Your prayers are granted, my servant, you will be the gardener of my flower garden.

2

"Ah, poet, the evening draws near; your hair is turning grey.
"Do you in your lonely musing hear the message of the hereafter?"

"It is evening," the poet said, "and I am listening because some one may call from the village, late though it be.
"I watch if young straying hearts meet together, and two pairs of eager eyes beg for music to break their silence and speak for them.
"Who is there to weave their passionate songs, if I sit on the shore of life and contemplate death and the beyond?

"The early evening star disappears.
"The glow of a funeral pyre slowly dies by the silent river.
"Jackals cry in chorus from the courtyard of the deserted house in the light of the worn−out moon.
"If some wanderer, leaving home, come here to watch the night and with bowed head listen to the murmur of the darkness, who is there to whisper the secrets of life into his ears if I, shutting my doors, should try to free myself from mortal bonds?

"It is a trifle that my hair is turning grey.
"I am ever as young or as old as the youngest and the oldest of this village.
"Some have smiles, sweet and simple, and some a sly twinkle in their eyes.
"Some have tears that well up in the daylight, and others tears that are hidden in the gloom.
They all have need for me, and I have no time to brood over the afterlife.
"I am of an age with each, what matter if my hair turns grey?"

3

In the morning I cast my net into the sea.
I dragged up from the dark abyss things of strange aspect and strange beauty—some shone like a smile, some glistened like tears, and some were flushed like the cheeks of a bride.
When with the day's burden I went home, my love was sitting in

the garden idly tearing the leaves of a flower.
I hesitated for a moment, and then placed at her feet all that I had dragged up, and stood silent.
She glanced at them and said, “What strange things are these? I know not of what use they are!”
I bowed my head in shame and thought, “I have not fought for these, I did not buy them in the market; they are not fit gifts for her.”
Then the whole night through I flung them one by one into the street.
In the morning travellers came; they picked them up and carried them into far countries.

4

Ah me, why did they build my house by the road to the market town?
They moor their laden boats near my trees.
They come and go and wander at their will.
I sit and watch them; my time wears on.
Turn them away I cannot. And thus my days pass by.

Night and day their steps sound by my door.
Vainly I cry, “I do not know you.”
Some of them are known to my fingers, some to my nostrils, the blood in my veins seems to know them, and some are known to my dreams.
Turn them away I cannot. I call them and say, “Come to my house whoever chooses. Yes, come.”

In the morning the bell rings in the temple.
They come with their baskets in their hands.
Their feet are rosy red. The early light of dawn is on their faces.
Turn them away I cannot. I call them and I say, “Come to my

garden to gather flowers. Come hither."

In the mid−day the gong sounds at the palace gate.
I know not why they leave their work and linger near my hedge.
The flowers in their hair are pale and faded; the notes are languid in their flutes.
Turn them away I cannot. I call them and say, "The shade is cool under my trees. Come, friends."

At night the crickets chirp in the woods.
Who is it that comes slowly to my door and gently knocks?
I vaguely see the face, not a word is spoken, the stillness of the sky is all around.
Turn away my silent guest I cannot. I look at the face through the dark, and hours of dreams pass by.

5

I am restless. I am athirst for far−away things.
My soul goes out in a longing to touch the skirt of the dim distance.
O Great Beyond, O the keen call of thy flute!
I forget, I ever forget, that I have no wings to fly, that I am bound in this spot evermore.

I am eager and wakeful, I am a stranger in a strange land.
Thy breath comes to me whispering an impossible hope.
Thy tongue is known to my heart as its very own.
O Far−to−seek, O the keen call of thy flute!
I forget, I ever forget, that I know not the way, that I have not the winged horse.

I am listless, I am a wanderer in my heart.
In the sunny haze of the languid hours, what vast vision of thine takes shape in the blue of the sky!
O Farthest end, O the keen call of thy flute!
I forget, I ever forget, that the gates are shut everywhere in the house where I dwell alone!

6

The tame bird was in a cage, the free bird was in the forest.
They met when the time came, it was a decree of fate.
The free bird cries, “O my love, let us fly to wood.”
The cage bird whispers, “Come hither, let us both live in the cage.”
Says the free bird, “Among bars, where is there room to spread one's wings?”
“Alas,” cries the cage bird, “I should not know where to sit perched in the sky.”

The free bird cries, “My darling, sing the songs of the woodlands.”
The cage bird says, “Sit by my side, I'll teach you the speech of the learned.”
The forest bird cries, “No, ah no! songs can never be taught.”
The cage bird says, “Alas for me, I know not the songs of the woodlands.”

Their love is intense with longing, but they never can fly wing to wing.
Through the bars of the cage they look, and vain is their wish to know each other.
They flutter their wings in yearning, and sing, “Come closer, my love!”
The free bird cries, “It cannot be, I fear the closed doors of

the cage."
The cage bird whispers, "Alas, my wings are powerless and dead."

7

O mother, the young Prince is to pass by our door,—how can I attend to my work this morning?
Show me how to braid up my hair; tell me what garment to put on.
Why do you look at me amazed, mother?
I know well he will not glance up once at my window; I know he will pass out of my sight in the twinkling of an eye; only the vanishing strain of the flute will come sobbing to me from afar.
But the young Prince will pass by our door, and I will put on my best for the moment.

O mother, the young Prince did pass by our door, and the morning sun flashed from his chariot.
I swept aside the veil from my face, I tore the ruby chain from my neck and flung it in his path.
Why do you look at me amazed, mother?
I know well he did not pick up my chain; I know it was crushed under his wheels leaving a red stain upon the dust, and no one knows what my gift was nor to whom.
But the young Prince did pass by our door, and I flung the jewel from my breast before his path.

8

When the lamp went out by my bed I woke up with the early birds.
I sat at my open window with a fresh wreath on my loose hair.
The young traveller came along the road in the rosy mist of the morning.
A pearl chain was on his neck, and the sun's rays fell on his crown. He stopped before my door and asked me with an eager cry, “Where is she?”
For very shame I could not say, “She is I, young traveller, she is I.”

It was dusk and the lamp was not lit.
I was listlessly braiding my hair.
The young traveller came on his chariot in the glow of the setting sun.
His horses were foaming at the mouth, and there was dust on his garment.
He alighted at my door and asked in a tired voice, “Where is she?”
For very shame I could not say, “She is I, weary traveller, she is I.”

It is an April night. The lamp is burning in my room.
The breeze of the south comes gently. The noisy parrot sleeps in its cage.
My bodice is of the colour of the peacock's throat, and my mantle is green as young grass.
I sit upon the floor at the window watching the deserted street.
Through the dark night I keep humming, “She is I, despairing traveller, she is I.”

9

When I go alone at night to my love−tryst, birds do not sing, the wind does not stir, the houses on both sides of the street stand silent.
It is my own anklets that grow loud at every step and I am ashamed.

When I sit on my balcony and listen for his footsteps, leaves do not rustle on the trees, and the water is still in the river like the sword on the knees of a sentry fallen asleep.
It is my own heart that beats wildly—I do not know how to quiet it.

When my love comes and sits by my side, when my body trembles and my eyelids droop, the night darkens, the wind blows out the lamp, and the clouds draw veils over the stars.
It is the jewel at my own breast that shines and gives light. I do not know how to hide it.

10

Let your work be, bride. Listen, the guest has come.
Do you hear, he is gently shaking the chain which fastens the door?
See that your anklets make no loud noise, and that your step is not over−hurried at meeting him.
Let your work be, bride, the guest has come in the evening.

No, it is not the ghostly wind, bride, do not be frightened.
It is the full moon on a night of April; shadows are pale in the courtyard; the sky overhead is bright.
Draw your veil over your face if you must, carry the lamp to the door if you fear.
No, it is not the ghostly wind, bride, do not be frightened.

Have no word with him if you are shy; stand aside by the door when you meet him.
If he asks you questions, and if you wish to, you can lower your eyes in silence.
Do not let your bracelets jingle when, lamp in hand, you lead him in.
Have no word with him if you are shy.

Have you not finished your work yet, bride? Listen, the guest has come.
Have you not lit the lamp in the cowshed?
Have you not got ready the offering basket for the evening service?
Have you not put the red lucky mark at the parting of your hair, and done your toilet for the night?
O bride, do you hear, the guest has come?
Let your work be!

11

Come as you are; do not loiter over your toilet.
If your braided hair has loosened, if the parting of your hair be not straight, if the ribbons of your bodice be not fastened, do not mind.
Come as you are; do not loiter over your toilet.

Come, with quick steps over the grass.
If the raddle come from your feet because of the dew, if the rings of bells upon your feet slacken, if pearls drop out of your chain, do not mind.
Come with quick steps over the grass.

Do you see the clouds wrapping the sky?
Flocks of cranes fly up from the further river−bank and fitful gusts of wind rush over the heath.
The anxious cattle run to their stalls in the village.
Do you see the clouds wrapping the sky?

In vain you light your toilet lamp—it flickers and goes out in the wind.
Who can know that your eyelids have not been touched with lamp−black? For your eyes are darker than rain−clouds.
In vain you light your toilet lamp—it goes out.

Come as you are; do not loiter over your toilet.
If the wreath is not woven, who cares; if the wrist−chain has not been linked, let it be.
The sky is overcast with clouds—it is late.
Come as you are; do not loiter over your toilet.

12

If you would be busy and fill your pitcher, come, O come to my lake.
The water will cling round your feet and babble its secret.
The shadow of the coming rain is on the sands, and the clouds hang low upon the blue lines of the trees like the heavy hair above your eyebrows.

I know well the rhythm of your steps, they are beating in my heart.
Come, O come to my lake, if you must fill your pitcher.

If you would be idle and sit listless and let your pitcher float on the water, come, O come to my lake.
The grassy slope is green, and the wild flowers beyond number.
Your thoughts will stray out of your dark eyes like birds from their nests.
Your veil will drop to your feet.
Come, O come to my lake if you must sit idle.

If you would leave off your play and dive in the water, come, O come to my lake.
Let your blue mantle lie on the shore; the blue water will cover you and hide you.
The waves will stand a−tiptoe to kiss your neck and whisper in your ears.
Come, O come to my lake, if you would dive in the water.

If you must be mad and leap to your death, come, O come to my lake.
It is cool and fathomlessly deep.
It is dark like a sleep that is dreamless.
There in its depths nights and days are one, and songs are silence.
Come, O come to my lake, if you would plunge to your death.

13

I asked nothing, only stood at the edge of the wood behind the tree.
Languor was still upon the eyes of the dawn, and the dew in the

air.
The lazy smell of the damp grass hung in the thin mist above the earth.
Under the banyan tree you were milking the cow with your hands, tender and fresh as butter.
And I was standing still.

I did not say a word. It was the bird that sang unseen from the thicket.
The mango tree was shedding its flowers upon the village road, and the bees came humming one by one.
On the side of the pond the gate of *Shiva's* temple was opened and the worshipper had begun his chants.
With the vessel on your lap you were milking the cow.
I stood with my empty can.

I did not come near you.
The sky woke with the sound of the gong at the temple.
The dust was raised in the road from the hoofs of the driven cattle.
With the gurgling pitchers at their hips, women came from the river.
Your bracelets were jingling, and foam brimming over the jar.
The morning wore on and I did not come near you.

14

I was walking by the road, I do not know why, when the noonday was past and bamboo branches rustled in the wind.
The prone shadows with their out−stretched arms clung to the feet of the hurrying light.
The *koels* were weary of their songs.
I was walking by the road, I do not know why.

The hut by the side of the water is shaded by an overhanging
tree.
Some one was busy with her work, and her bangles made music in
the corner.
I stood before this hut, I know not why.

The narrow winding road crosses many a mustard field, and many a
mango forest.
It passes by the temple of the village and the market at the
river landing place.
I stopped by this hut, I do not know why.

Years ago it was a day of breezy March when the murmur of the
spring was languorous, and mango blossoms were dropping on the
dust.
The rippling water leapt and licked the brass vessel that stood
on the landing step.
I think of that day of breezy March, I do not know why.

Shadows are deepening and cattle returning to their folds.
The light is grey upon the lonely meadows, and the villagers are
waiting for the ferry at the bank.
I slowly return upon my steps, I do not know why.

15

I run as a musk−deer runs in the shadow of the forest mad with
his own perfume.
The night is the night of mid−May, the breeze is the breeze of
the south.
I lose my way and I wander, I seek what I cannot get, I get what
I do not seek.

From my heart comes out and dances the image of my own desire.
The gleaming vision flits on.
I try to clasp it firmly, it eludes me and leads me astray.
I seek what I cannot get, I get what I do not seek.

16

Hands cling to hands and eyes linger on eyes: thus begins the record of our hearts.
It is the moonlit night of March; the sweet smell of *henna* is in the air; my flute lies on the earth neglected and your garland of flowers in unfinished.
This love between you and me is simple as a song.

Your veil of the saffron colour makes my eyes drunk.
The jasmine wreath that you wove me thrills to my heart like praise.
It is a game of giving and withholding, revealing and screening again; some smiles and some little shyness, and some sweet useless struggles.
This love between you and me is simple as a song.

No mystery beyond the present; no striving for the impossible; no shadow behind the charm; no groping in the depth of the dark.
This love between you and me is simple as a song.

We do not stray out of all words into the ever silent; we do not raise our hands to the void for things beyond hope.
It is enough what we give and we get.
We have not crushed the joy to the utmost to wring from it the

wine of pain.
This love between you and me is simple as a song.

17

The yellow bird sings in their tree and makes my heart dance with gladness.
We both live in the same village, and that is our one piece of joy.
Her pair of pet lambs come to graze in the shade of our garden trees.
If they stray into our barley field, I take them up in my arms.
The name of our village is Khanjane, and Anjane they call our river.
My name is known to all the village, and her name is Ranjane.

Only one field lies between us.
Bees that have hived in our grove go to seek honey in theirs.
Flowers launched from their landing−stairs come floating by the stream where we bathe.
Baskets of dried *kusm* flowers come from their fields to our market.
The name of our village is Khanjane, and Anjane they call our river.
My name is known to all the village, and her name is Ranjane.

The lane that winds to their house is fragrant in the spring with mango flowers.
When their linseed is ripe for harvest the hemp is in bloom in our field.
The stars that smile on their cottage send us the same twinkling look.
The rain that floods their tank makes glad our *kadam* forest.
The name of our village is Khanjane, and Anjane they call our

river.
My name is known to all the village, and her name is Ranjane.

18

When the two sisters go to fetch water, they come to this spot
and they smile.
They must be aware of somebody who stands behind the trees
whenever they go to fetch water.

The two sisters whisper to each other when they pass this spot.
They must have guessed the secret of that somebody who stands
behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water.

Their pitchers lurch suddenly, and water spills when they reach
this spot.
They must have found out that somebody's heart is beating who
stands behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water.

The two sisters glance at each other when they come to this spot,
and they smile.
There is a laughter in their swift−stepping feet, which makes
confusion in somebody's mind who stands behind the trees
whenever they go to fetch water.

19

You walked by the riverside path with the full pitcher upon your hip.
Why did you swiftly turn your face and peep at me through your fluttering veil?
That gleaming look from the dark came upon me like a breeze that sends a shiver through the rippling water and sweeps away to the shadowy shore.
It came to me like the bird of the evening that hurriedly flies across the lampless room from the one open window to the other, and disappears in the night.
You are hidden as a star behind the hills, and I am a passer−by upon the road.
But why did you stop for a moment and glance at my face through your veil while you walked by the riverside path with the full pitcher upon your hip?

20

Day after day he comes and goes away.
Go, and give him a flower from my hair, my friend.
If he asks who was it that sent it, I entreat you do not tell him my name—for he only comes and goes away.

He sits on the dust under the tree.
Spread there a seat with flowers and leaves, my friend.
His eyes are sad, and they bring sadness to my heart.
He does not speak what he has in mind; he only comes and goes away.

21

Why did he choose to come to my door, the wandering youth, when the day dawned?
As I come in and out I pass by him every time, and my eyes are caught by his face.
I know not if I should speak to him or keep silent. Why did he choose to come to my door?

The cloudy nights in July are dark; the sky is soft blue in the autumn; the spring days are restless with the south wind.
He weaves his songs with fresh tunes every time.
I turn from my work and my eyes fill with the mist. Why did he choose to come to my door?

22

When she passed by me with quick steps, the end of her skirt touched me.
From the unknown island of a heart came a sudden warm breath of spring.
A flutter of a flitting touch brushed me and vanished in a moment, like a torn flower petal blown in the breeze.
It fell upon my heart like a sigh of her body and whisper of her heart.

23

Why do you sit there and jingle your bracelets in mere idle
  sport?
Fill your pitcher. It is time for you to come home.

Why do you stir the water with your hands and fitfully glance at
  the road for some one in mere idle sport?
Fill your pitcher and come home.

The morning hours pass by—the dark waters flows on.
The waves are laughing and whispering to each other in mere idle
  sport.

The wandering clouds have gathered at the edge of the sky on
  yonder rise of the land.
They linger and look at your face and smile in mere idle sport.
Fill your pitcher and come home.

24

Do not keep to yourself the secret of your heart, my friend!
Say it to me, only to me, in secret.
You who smile so gently, softly whisper, my heart will hear it,
  not my ears.

The night is deep, the house is silent, the birds' nests are
  shrouded with sleep.
Speak to me through hesitating tears, through faltering smiles,
  through sweet shame and pain, the secret of your heart!

25

"Come to us, youth, tell us truly why there is madness in your eyes?"
"I know not what wine of wild poppy I have drunk, that there is this madness in my eyes."
"Ah, shame!"
"Well, some are wise and some foolish, some are watchful and some careless. There are eyes that smile and eyes that weep—and madness is in my eyes."

"Youth, why do you stand so still under the shadow of the tree?"
"My feet are languid with the burden of my heart, and I stand still in the shadow."
"Ah, shame!"
"Well, some march on their way and some linger, some are free and some are fettered—and my feet are languid with the burden of my heart."

26

"What comes from your willing hands I take. I beg for nothing more."
"Yes, yes, I know you, modest mendicant, you ask for all that one has."

"If there be a stray flower for me I will wear it in my heart."
"But if there be thorns?"
"I will endure them."
"Yes, yes, I know you, modest mendicant, you ask for all that one has."

"If but once you should raise your loving eyes to my face it would make my life sweet beyond death."
"But if there by only cruel glances?"
"I will keep them piercing my heart."
"Yes, yes, I know you, modest mendicant, you ask for all that one has."

27

"Trust love even if it brings sorrow. Do not close up your heart."
"Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them."

"The heart is only for giving away with a tear and a song, my love."
"Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them."

"Pleasure is frail like a dewdrop, while it laughs it dies. But sorrow is strong and abiding. Let sorrowful love wake in your eyes."
"Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them."

"The lotus blooms in the sight of the sun, and loses all that it has. It would not remain in bud in the eternal winter mist."
"Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them."

28

Your questioning eyes are sad. They seek to know my meaning as the moon would fathom the sea.
I have bared my life before your eyes from end to end, with nothing hidden or held back. That is why you know me not.
If it were only a gem I could break it into a hundred pieces and string them into a chain to put on your neck.
If it were only a flower, round and small and sweet, I could pluck it from its stem to set it in your hair.
But it is a heart, my beloved. Where are its shores and its bottom?
You know not the limits of this kingdom, still you are its queen.
If it were only a moment of pleasure it would flower in an easy smile, and you could see it and read it in a moment.

If it were merely a pain it would melt in limpid tears,
reflecting its inmost secret without a word.
But it is love, my beloved.
Its pleasure and pain are boundless, and endless its wants and wealth.
It is as near to you as your life, but you can never wholly know it.

29

Speak to me, my love! Tell me in words what you sang.
The night is dark. The stars are lost in clouds. The wind is sighing through the leaves.
I will let loose my hair. My blue cloak will cling round me like night. I will clasp your head to my bosom; and there in the sweet loneliness murmur on your heart. I will shut my eyes and listen. I will not look in your face.
When your words are ended, we will sit still and silent. Only the trees will whisper in the dark.
The night will pale. The day will dawn. We shall look at each other's eyes and go on our different paths.
Speak to me, my love! Tell me in words what you sang.

30

You are the evening cloud floating in the sky of my dreams.
I paint you and fashion you ever with my love longings.
You are my own, my own, Dweller in my endless dreams!

Your feet are rosy−red with the glow of my heart's desire, Gleaner of my sunset songs!
Your lips are bitter−sweet with the taste of my wine of pain.
You are my own, my own, Dweller in my lonesome dreams!

With the shadow of my passion have I darkened your eyes, Haunter of the depth of my gaze!
I have caught you and wrapt you, my love, in the net of my music.
You are my own, my own, Dweller in my deathless dreams!

31

My heart, the bird of the wilderness, has found its sky in your
eyes.
They are the cradle of the morning, they are the kingdom of the
stars.
My songs are lost in their depths.
Let me but soar in that sky, in its lonely immensity.
Let me but cleave its clouds and spread wings in its sunshine.

32

Tell me if this be all true, my lover, tell me if this be true.
When these eyes flash their lightning the dark clouds in your
breast make stormy answer.
Is it true that my lips are sweet like the opening bud of the
first conscious love?
Do the memories of vanished months of May linger in my limbs?
Does the earth, like a harp, shiver into songs with the touch of
my feet?
Is it then true that the dewdrops fall from the eyes of night
when I am seen, and the morning light is glad when it wraps my
body round?
Is it true, is it true, that your love travelled alone through
ages and worlds in search of me?
That when you found me at last, your age−long desire found utter
peace in my gentle speech and my eyes and lips and flowing
hair?
Is it then true that the mystery of the Infinite is written on
this little forehead of mine?
Tell me, my lover, if all this be true.

33

I love you, beloved. Forgive me my love.
Like a bird losing its way I am caught.
When my heart was shaken it lost its veil and was naked. Cover
it with pity, beloved, and forgive me my love.

If you cannot love me, beloved, forgive me my pain.
Do not look askance at me from afar.
I will steal back to my corner and sit in the dark.
With both hands I will cover my naked shame.
Turn your face from me, beloved, and forgive me my pain.

If you love me, beloved, forgive me my joy.
When my heart is borne away by the flood of happiness, do not smile at my perilous abandonment.
When I sit on my throne and rule you with my tyranny of love, when like a goddess I grant you my favour, bear with my pride, beloved, and forgive me my joy.

34

Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.
I have watched all night, and now my eyes are heavy with sleep.
I fear lest I lose you when I am sleeping.
Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.

I start up and stretch my hands to touch you. I ask myself, “Is it a dream?”
Could I but entangle your feet with my heart and hold them fast to my breast!
Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.

35

Lest I should know you too easily, you play with me.
You blind me with flashes of laughter to hide your tears.
I know, I know your art.
You never say the word you would.

Lest I should not prize you, you elude me in a thousand ways.
Lest I should confuse you with the crowd, you stand aside.
I know, I know your art,
You never walk the path you would.

Your claim is more than that of others, that is why you are
silent.
With playful carelessness you avoid my gifts.
I know, I know your art,
You never will take what you would.

36

He whispered, “My love, raise your eyes.”
I sharply chid him, and said “Go!”; but he did not stir.
He stood before me and held both my hands. I said, “Leave me!”;
but he did not go.

He brought his face near my ear. I glanced at him and said,
“What a shame!”; but he did not move.
His lips touched my cheek. I trembled and said, “You dare too
much”; but he had no shame.

He put a flower in my hair. I said, “It is useless!”; but he
stood unmoved.
He took the garland from my neck and went away. I weep and ask
my heart, “Why does he not come back?”

37

Would you put your wreath of fresh flowers on my neck, fair one?
But you must know that the one wreath that I had woven is for the
many, for those who are seen in glimpses, or dwell in lands
unexplored, or live in poets' songs.

It is too late to ask my heart in return for yours.
There was a time when my life was like a bud, all its perfume was
stored in its core.
Now it is squandered far and wide.
Who knows the enchantment that can gather and shut it up again?

My heart is not mine to give to one only, it is given to the many.

38

My love, once upon a time your poet launched a great epic in his mind.
Alas, I was not careful, and it struck your ringing anklets and came to grief.
It broke up into scraps of songs and lay scattered at your feet.
All my cargo of the stories of old wars was tossed by the laughing waves and soaked in tears and sank.
You must make this loss good to me, my love.
If my claims to immortal fame after death are shattered, make me immortal while I live.
And I will not mourn for my loss nor blame you.

39

I try to weave a wreath all the morning, but the flowers slip and they drop out.
You sit there watching me in secret through the corner of your prying eyes.
Ask those eyes, darkly planning mischief, whose fault it was.

I try to sing a song, but in vain.
A hidden smile trembles on your lips, ask of it the reason of my failure.
Let your smiling lips say on oath how my voice lost itself in silence like a drunken bee in the lotus.

It is evening, and the time for the flowers to close their petals.
Give me leave to sit by your side, and bid my lips to do the work that can be done in silence and in the dim light of stars.

40

An unbelieving smile flits on your eyes when I come to you to take my leave.
I have done it so often that you think I will soon return.
To tell you the truth I have the same doubt in my mind.
For the spring days come again time after time; the full moon takes leave and comes on another visit, the flowers come again and blush upon their branches year after year, and it is likely that I take my leave only to come to you again.
But keep the illusion awhile; do not send it away with ungentle haste.
When I say I leave you for all time, accept it as true, and let a mist of tears for one moment deepen the dark rim of your eyes.
Then smile as archly as you like when I come again.

41

I long to speak the deepest words I have to say to you; but I dare not, for fear you should laugh.
That is why I laugh at myself and shatter my secret in jest.
I make light of my pain, afraid you should do so.

I long to tell you the truest words I have to say to you; but I dare not, being afraid that you would not believe them.
That is why I disguise them in untruth, saying the contrary of what I mean.
I make my pain appear absurd, afraid that you should do so.

I long to use the most precious words I have for you; but I dare not, fearing I should not be paid with like value.
That is why I gave you hard names and boast of my callous strength.
I hurt you, for fear you should never know any pain.

I long to sit silent by you; but I dare not lest my heart come out at my lips.
That is why I prattle and chatter lightly and hide my heart behind words.
I rudely handle my pain, for fear you should do so.

I long to go away from your side; but I dare not, for fear my cowardice should become known to you.
That is why I hold my head high and carelessly come into your presence.
Constant thrusts from your eyes keep my pain fresh for ever.

42

O mad, superbly drunk;
If you kick open your doors and play the fool in public;
If you empty your bag in a night, and snap your fingers at prudence;
If you walk in curious paths and play with useless things;
Reck not rhyme or reason;
If unfurling your sails before the storm you snap the rudder in two,
Then I will follow you, comrade, and be drunken and go to the dogs.

I have wasted my days and nights in the company of steady wise neighbours.
Much knowing has turned my hair grey, and much watching has made my sight dim.
For years I have gathered and heaped up scraps and fragments of things;
Crush them and dance upon them, and scatter them all to the winds.
For I know 'tis the height of wisdom to be drunken and go to the dogs.

Let all crooked scruples vanish, let me hopelessly lose my way.
Let a gust of wild giddiness come and sweep me away from my anchors.
The world is peopled with worthies, and workers, useful and clever.
There are men who are easily first, and men who come decently after.
Let them be happy and prosper, and let me be foolishly futile.
For I know 'tis the end of all works to be drunken and go to the dogs.

I swear to surrender this moment all claims to the ranks of the
 decent.
I let go my pride of learning and judgment of right and of wrong.
I'll shatter memory's vessel, scattering the last drop of tears.
With the foam of the berry−red wine I will bathe and brighten my
 laughter.
The badge of the civil and staid I'll tear into shreds for the
 nonce.
I'll take the holy vow to be worthless, to be drunken and go to
 the dogs.

43

No, my friends, I shall never be an ascetic, whatever you may say.
I shall never be an ascetic if she does not take the vow with me.
It is my firm resolve that if I cannot find a shady shelter and a
 companion for my penance, I shall never turn ascetic.

No, my friends, I shall never leave my hearth and home, and
 retire into the forest solitude, if rings no merry laughter in
 its echoing shade and if the end of no saffron mantle flutters
 in the wind; if its silence is not deepened by soft whispers.
I shall never be an ascetic.

44

Reverend sir, forgive this pair of sinners. Spring winds to−day
 are blowing in wild eddies, driving dust and dead leaves away,
 and with them your lessons are all lost.
Do not say, father, that life is a vanity.
For we have made truce with death for once, and only for a few
 fragrant hours we two have been made immortal.

Even if the king's army came and fiercely fell upon us we should
 sadly shake our heads and say, Brothers, you are disturbing us.
 If you must have this noisy game, go and clatter your arms
 elsewhere. Since only for a few fleeting moments we have been
 made immortal.

If friendly people came and flocked around us, we should humbly bow to them and say, This extravagant good fortune is an embarrassment to us. Room is scarce in the infinite sky where we dwell. For in the springtime flowers come in crowds, and the busy wings of bees jostle each other. Our little heaven, where dwell only we two immortals, is too absurdly narrow.

45

To the guests that must go bid God's speed and brush away all traces of their steps.
Take to your bosom with a smile what is easy and simple and near.
To−day is the festival of phantoms that know not when they die.
Let your laughter be but a meaningless mirth like twinkles of light on the ripples.
Let your life lightly dance on the edges of Time like dew on the tip of a leaf.
Strike in chords from your harp fitful momentary rhythms.

46

You left me and went on your way.
I thought I should mourn for you and set your solitary image in my heart wrought in a golden song.
But ah, my evil fortune, time is short.

Youth wanes year after year; the spring days are fugitive; the frail flowers die for nothing, and the wise man warns me that life is but a dew−drop on the lotus leaf.
Should I neglect all this to gaze after one who has turned her back on me?
That would be rude and foolish, for time is short.

Then, come, my rainy nights with pattering feet; smile, my golden autumn; come, careless April, scattering your kisses abroad.
You come, and you, and you also!
My loves, you know we are mortals. Is it wise to break one's heart for the one who takes her heart away? For time is short.

It is sweet to sit in a corner to muse and write in rhymes that
you are all my world.
It is heroic to hug one's sorrow and determine not to be
consoled.
But a fresh face peeps across my door and raises its eyes to my
eyes.
I cannot but wipe away my tears and change the tune of my song.
For time is short.

47

If you would have it so, I will end my singing.
If it sets your heart aflutter, I will take away my eyes from
your face.
If it suddenly startles you in your walk, I will step aside and
take another path.
If it confuses you in your flower−weaving, I will shun your
lonely garden.
If it makes the water wanton and wild, I will not row my boat by
your bank.

48

Free me from the bonds of your sweetness, my love! No more of
this wine of kisses.
This mist of heavy incense stifles my heart.
Open the doors, make room for the morning light.
I am lost in you, wrapped in the folds of your caresses.
Free me from your spells, and give me back the manhood to offer
you my freed heart.

49

I hold her hands and press her to my breast.
I try to fill my arms with her loveliness, to plunder her sweet
smile with kisses, to drink her dark glances with my eyes.
Ah, but, where is it? Who can strain the blue from the sky?
I try to grasp the beauty, it eludes me, leaving only the body in
my hands.

Baffled and weary I come back.
How can the body touch the flower which only the spirit may touch?

50

Love, my heart longs day and night for the meeting with you—for the meeting that is like all−devouring death.
Sweep me away like a storm; take everything I have; break open my sleep and plunder my dreams. Rob me of my world.
In that devastation, in the utter nakedness of spirit, let us become one in beauty.
Alas for my vain desire! Where is this hope for union except in thee, my God?

51

Then finish the last song and let us leave.
Forget this night when the night is no more.
Whom do I try to clasp in my arms? Dreams can never be made captive.
My eager hands press emptiness to my heart and it bruises my breast.

52

Why did the lamp go out?
I shaded it with my cloak to save it from the wind, that is why the lamp went out.

Why did the flower fade?
I pressed it to my heart with anxious love, that is why the flower faded.

Why did the stream dry up?
I put a dam across it to have it for my use, that is why the

stream dried up.

Why did the harp−string break?
I tried to force a note that was beyond its power, that is why
the harp−string is broken.

53

Why do you put me to shame with a look?
I have not come as a beggar.
Only for a passing hour I stood at the end of your courtyard
outside the garden hedge.
Why do you put me to shame with a look?

Not a rose did I gather from your garden, not a fruit did I
pluck.
I humbly took my shelter under the wayside shade where every
strange traveller may stand.
Not a rose did I pluck.

Yes, my feet were tired, and the shower of rain come down.
The winds cried out among the swaying bamboo branches.
The clouds ran across the sky as though in the flight from
defeat.
My feet were tired.

I know not what you thought of me or for whom you were waiting at
your door.
Flashes of lightning dazzled your watching eyes.
How could I know that you could see me where I stood in the dark?
I know not what you thought of me.

The day is ended, and the rain has ceased for a moment.
I leave the shadow of the tree at the end of your garden and this
seat on the grass.
It has darkened; shut your door; I go my way.
The day is ended.

54

Where do you hurry with your basket this late evening when the marketing is over?
They all have come home with their burdens; the moon peeps from above the village trees.
The echoes of the voices calling for the ferry run across the dark water to the distant swamp where wild ducks sleep.
Where do you hurry with your basket when the marketing is over?

Sleep has laid her fingers upon the eyes of the earth.
The nests of the crows have become silent, and the murmurs of the bamboo leaves are silent.
The labourers home from their fields spread their mats in the courtyards.
Where do you hurry with your basket when the marketing is over?

55

It was mid−day when you went away.
The sun was strong in the sky.
I had done my work and sat alone on my balcony when you went away.

Fitful gusts came winnowing through the smells of many distant fields.
The doves cooed tireless in the shade, and a bee strayed in my room humming the news of many distant fields.

The village slept in the noonday heat. The road lay deserted.
In sudden fits the rustling of the leaves rose and died.
I glazed at the sky and wove in the blue the letters of a name I had known, while the village slept in the noonday heat.

I had forgotten to braid my hair. The languid breeze played with it upon my cheek.

The river ran unruffled under the shady bank.
The lazy white clouds did not move.
I had forgotten to braid my hair.

It was mid−day when you went away.
The dust of the road was hot and the fields panting.
The doves cooed among the dense leaves.
I was alone in my balcony when you went away.

56

I was one among many women busy with the obscure daily tasks of the household.
Why did you single me out and bring me away from the cool shelter of our common life?

Love unexpressed in sacred. It shines like gems in the gloom of the hidden heart. In the light of the curious day it looks pitifully dark.
Ah, you broke through the cover of my heart and dragged my trembling love into the open place, destroying for ever the shady corner where it hid its nest.

The other women are the same as ever.
No one has peeped into their inmost being, and they themselves know not their own secret.
Lightly they smile, and weep, chatter, and work. Daily they go to the temple, light their lamps, and fetch water from the river.

I hoped my love would be saved from the shivering shame of the shelterless, but you turn your face away.
Yes, your path lies open before you, but you have cut off my return, and left me stripped naked before the world with its lidless eyes staring night and day.

57

I plucked your flower, O world!
I pressed it to my heart and the thorn pricked.
When the day waned and it darkened, I found that the flower had faded, but the pain remained.

More flowers will come to you with perfume and pride, O world!
But my time for flower−gathering is over, and through the dark night I have not my rose, only the pain remains.

58

One morning in the flower garden a blind girl came to offer me a flower chain in the cover of a lotus leaf.
I put it round my neck, and tears came to my eyes.
I kissed her and said, “You are blind even as the flowers are.
“You yourself know not how beautiful is your gift.”

59

O woman, you are not merely the handiwork of God, but also of men; these are ever endowing you with beauty from their hearts.
Poets are weaving for you a web with threads of golden imagery; painters are giving your form ever new immortality.
The sea gives its pearls, the mines their gold, the summer gardens their flowers to deck you, to cover you, to make you more precious.
The desire of men's hearts has shed its glory over your youth.
You are one half woman and one half dream.

60

Amidst the rush and roar of life, O Beauty, carved in stone, you stand mute and still, alone and aloof.

Great Time sits enamoured at your feet and murmurs:
“Speak, speak to me, my love; speak, my bride!”
But your speech is shut up in stone, O Immovable Beauty!

61

Peace, my heart, let the time for the parting be sweet.
Let it not be a death but completeness.
Let love melt into memory and pain into songs.
Let the flight through the sky end in the folding of the wings over the nest.
Let the last touch of your hands be gentle like the flower of the night.
Stand still, O Beautiful End, for a moment, and say your last words in silence.
I bow to you and hold up my lamp to light you on your way.

62

In the dusky path of a dream I went to seek the love who was mine in a former life.

Her house stood at the end of a desolate street.
In the evening breeze her pet peacock sat drowsing on its perch, and the pigeons were silent in their corner.

She set her lamp down by the portal and stood before me.
She raised her large eyes to my face and mutely asked, “Are you well, my friend?”
I tried to answer, but our language had been lost and forgotten.

I thought and thought; our names would not come to my mind.
Tears shone in her eyes. She held up her right hand to me. I took it and stood silent.

Out lamp had flickered in the evening breeze and died.

63

Traveller, must you go?
The night is still and the darkness swoons upon the forest.
The lamps are bright in our balcony, the flowers all fresh, and
 the youthful eyes still awake.
Is the time for your parting come?
Traveller, must you go?

We have not bound your feet with our entreating arms.
Your doors are open. Your horse stands saddled at the gate.
If we have tried to bar your passage it was but with our songs.
Did we ever try to hold you back it was but with our eyes.
Traveller, we are helpless to keep you. We have only our tears.

What quenchless fire glows in your eyes?
What restless fever runs in your blood?
What call from the dark urges you?
What awful incantation have you read among the stars in the sky,
 that with a sealed secret message the night entered your heart,
 silent and strange?

If you do not care for merry meetings, if you must have peace,
 weary heart, we shall put our lamps out and silence our harps.
We shall sit still in the dark in the rustle of leaves, and the
 tired moon will shed pale rays on your window.
O traveller, what sleepless spirit has touched you from the heart
 of the mid−night?

64

I spent my day on the scorching hot dust of the road.
Now, in the cool of the evening, I knock at the door of the inn.
 It is deserted and in ruins.
A grim *ashath* tree spreads its hungry clutching roots
 through the gaping fissures of the walls.

Days have been when wayfarers came here to wash their weary feet.
They spread their mats in the courtyard in the dim light of the early moon, and sat and talked of strange lands.
They work refreshed in the morning when birds made them glad, and friendly flowers nodded their heads at them from the wayside.

But no lighted lamp awaited me when I came here.
The black smudges of smoke left by many a forgotten evening lamp stare, like blind eyes, from the wall.
Fireflies flit in the bush near the dried−up pond, and bamboo branches fling their shadows on the grass−grown path.
I am the guest of no one at the end of my day.
The long night is before me, and I am tired.

65

Is that your call again?
The evening has come. Weariness clings around me like the arms of entreating love.
Do you call me?

I had given all my day to you, cruel mistress, must you also rob me of my night?
Somewhere there is an end to everything, and the loneness of the dark is one's own.
Must your voice cut through it and smite me?

Has the evening no music of sleep at your gate?
Do the silent−winged stars never climb the sky above your pitiless tower?
Do the flowers never drop on the dust in soft death in your garden?

Must you call me, you unquiet one?
Then let the sad eyes of love vainly watch and weep.
Let the lamp burn in the lonely house.
Let the ferry−boat take the weary labourers to their home.
I leave behind my dreams and I hasten to your call.

66

A wandering madman was seeking the touchstone, with matted locks
tawny and dust−laden, and body worn to a shadow, his lips
tight−pressed, like the shut−up doors of his heart, his burning
eyes like the lamp of a glow−worm seeking its mate.

Before him the endless ocean roared.
The garrulous waves ceaselessly talked of hidden treasures,
mocking the ignorance that knew not their meaning.
Maybe he now had no hope remaining, yet he would not rest, for
the search had become his life,—
Just as the ocean for ever lifts its arms to the sky for the
unattainable—
Just as the stars go in circles, yet seeking a goal that can
never be reached—
Even so on the lonely shore the madman with dusty tawny locks
still roamed in search of the touchstone.

One day a village boy came up and asked, “Tell me, where did you
come at this golden chain about your waist?”
The madman started—the chain that once was iron was verily gold;
it was not a dream, but he did not know when it had changed.
He struck his forehead wildly—where, O where had he without
knowing it achieved success?
It had grown into a habit, to pick up pebbles and touch the
chain, and to throw them away without looking to see if a
change had come; thus the madman found and lost the touchstone.
The sun was sinking low in the west, the sky was of gold.
The madman returned on his footsteps to seek anew the lost
treasure, with his strength gone, his body bent, and his heart
in the dust, like a tree uprooted.

67

Though the evening comes with slow steps and has signalled for
all songs to cease;
Though your companions have gone to their rest and you are tired;
Though fear broods in the dark and the face of the sky is veiled;
Yet, bird, O my bird, listen to me, do not close your wings.

That is not the gloom of the leaves of the forest, that is the sea swelling like a dark black snake.
That is not the dance of the flowering jasmine, that is flashing foam.
Ah, where is the sunny green shore, where is your nest?
Bird, O my bird, listen to me, do not close your wings.

The lone night lies along your path, the dawn sleeps behind the shadowy hills.
The stars hold their breath counting the hours, the feeble moon swims the deep night.
Bird, O my bird, listen to me, do not close your wings.

There is no hope, no fear for you.
There is no word, no whisper, no cry.
There is no home, no bed for rest.
There is only your own pair of wings and the pathless sky.
Bird, O my bird, listen to me, do not close your wings.

68

None lives for ever, brother, and nothing lasts for long. Keep that in mind and rejoice.
Our life is not the one old burden, our path is not the one long journey.
One sole poet has not to sing one aged song.
The flower fades and dies; but he who wears the flower has not to mourn for it for ever.
Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.

There must come a full pause to weave perfection into music.
Life droops toward its sunset to be drowned in the golden shadows.
Love must be called from its play to drink sorrow and be borne to the heaven of tears.
Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.

We hasten to gather our flowers lest they are plundered by the
  passing winds.
It quickens our blood and brightens our eyes to snatch kisses
  that would vanish if we delayed.
Our life is eager, our desires are keen, for time tolls the bell
  of parting.
Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.

There is not time for us to clasp a thing and crush it and fling
  it away to the dust.
The hours trip rapidly away, hiding their dreams in their skirts.
Our life is short; it yields but a few days for love.
Were it for work and drudgery it would be endlessly long.
Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.

Beauty is sweet to us, because she dances to the same fleeting
  tune with our lives.
Knowledge is precious to us, because we shall never have time to
  complete it.
All is done and finished in the eternal Heaven.
But earth's flowers of illusion are kept eternally fresh by
  death.
Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.

69

I hunt for the golden stag.
You may smile, my friends, but I pursue the vision that eludes
  me.
I run across hills and dales, I wander through nameless lands,
  because I am hunting for the golden stag.
You come and buy in the market and go back to your homes laden
  with goods, but the spell of the homeless winds has touched me
  I know not when and where.
I have no care in my heart; all my belongings I have left far
  behind me.
I run across hills and dales, I wander through nameless lands—
  because I am hunting for the golden stag.

70

I remember a day in my childhood I floated a paper boat in the ditch.
It was a wet day of July; I was alone and happy over my play.
I floated my paper boat in the ditch.

Suddenly the storm clouds thickened, winds came in gusts, and rain poured in torrents.
Rills of muddy water rushed and swelled the stream and sunk my boat.
Bitterly I thought in my mind that the storm came on purpose to spoil my happiness; all its malice was against me.

The cloudy day of July is long today, and I have been musing over all those games in life wherein I was loser.
I was blaming my fate for the many tricks it played on me, when suddenly I remembered the paper boat that sank in the ditch.

71

The day is not yet done, the fair is not over, the fair on the river−bank.
I had feared that my time had been squandered and my last penny lost.
But no, my brother, I have still something left. My fate has not cheated me of everything.

The selling and buying are over.
All the dues on both sides have been gathered in, and it is time for me to go home.
But, gatekeeper, do you ask for your toll?
Do not fear, I have still something left. My fate has not cheated me of everything.

The lull in the wind threatens storm, and the lowering clouds in

the west bode no good.
The hushed water waits for the wind.
I hurry to cross the river before the night overtakes me.
O ferryman, you want your fee!
Yes, brother, I have still something left. My fate has not cheated me of everything.

In the wayside under the tree sits the beggar. Alas, he looks at my face with a timid hope!
He thinks I am rich with the day's profit.
Yes, brother, I have still something left. My fate has not cheated me of everything.

The night grows dark and the road lonely. Fireflies gleam among the leaves.
Who are you that follow me with stealthy silent steps?
Ah, I know, it is your desire to rob me of all my gains. I will not disappoint you!
For I still have something left, and my fate has not cheated me of everything.

At midnight I reach home. My hands are empty.
You are waiting with anxious eyes at my door, sleepless and silent.
Like a timorous bird you fly to my breast with eager love.
Ay, ay, my God, much remains still. My fate has not cheated me of everything.

72

With days of hard travail I raised a temple. It had no doors or windows, its walls were thickly built with massive stones.
I forgot all else, I shunned all the world, I gazed in rapt contemplation at the image I had set upon the altar.
It was always night inside, and lit by the lamps of perfumed oil.
The ceaseless smoke of incense wound my heart in its heavy coils.
Sleepless, I carved on the walls fantastic figures in mazy bewildering lines—winged horses, flowers with human faces, women with limbs like serpents.
No passage was left anywhere through which could enter the song of birds, the murmur of leaves or hum of the busy village.

The only sound that echoed in its dark dome was that of incantations which I chanted.
My mind became keen and still like a pointed flame, my senses swooned in ecstasy.
I knew not how time passed till the thunderstone had struck the temple, and a pain stung me through the heart.

The lamp looked pale and ashamed; the carvings on the walls, like chained dreams, stared meaningless in the light as they would fain hide themselves.
I looked at the image on the altar. I saw it smiling and alive with the living touch of God. The night I had imprisoned had spread its wings and vanished.

73

Infinite wealth is not yours, my patient and dusky mother dust!
You toil to fill the mouths of your children, but food is scarce.
The gift of gladness that you have for us is never perfect.
The toys that you make for your children are fragile.
You cannot satisfy all our hungry hopes, but should I desert you for that?
Your smile which is shadowed with pain is sweet to my eyes.
Your love which knows not fulfilment is dear to my heart.
From your breast you have fed us with life but not immortality, that is why your eyes are ever wakeful.
For ages you are working with colour and song, yet your heaven is not built, but only its sad suggestion.
Over your creations of beauty there is the mist of tears.
I will pour my songs into your mute heart, and my love into your love.
I will worship you with labour.
I have seen your tender face and I love your mournful dust, Mother Earth.

74

In the world's audience hall, the simple blade of grass sits on the same carpet with the sunbeam and the stars of midnight.
Thus my songs share their seats in the heart of the world with the music of the clouds and forests.
But, you man of riches, your wealth has no part in the simple

grandeur of the sun's glad gold and the mellow gleam of the musing moon.
The blessing of all−embracing sky is not shed upon it.
And when death appears, it pales and withers and crumbles into dust.

75

At midnight the would−be ascetic announced:
“This is the time to give up my home and seek for God. Ah, who has held me so long in delusion here?”
God whispered, “I,” but the ears of the man were stopped.
With a baby asleep at her breast lay his wife, peacefully sleeping on one side of the bed.
The man said, “Who are ye that have fooled me so long?”
The voice said again, “They are God,” but he heard it not.
The baby cried out in its dream, nestling close to its mother.
God commanded, “Stop, fool, leave not thy home,” but still he heard not.
God sighed and complained, “Why does my servant wander to seek me, forsaking me?”

76

The fair was on before the temple. It had rained from the early morning and the day came to its end.
Brighter than all the gladness of the crowd was the bright smile of a girl who bought for a farthing a whistle of palm leaf.
The shrill joy of that whistle floated above all laughter and noise.
An endless throng of people came and jostled together. The road was muddy, the river in flood, the field under water in ceaseless rain.
Greater than all the troubles of the crowd was a little boy's trouble—he had not a farthing to buy a painted stick.
His wistful eyes gazing at the shop made this whole meeting of men so pitiful.

77

The workman and his wife from the west country are busy digging to make bricks for the kiln.
Their little daughter goes to the landing−place by the river; there she has no end of scouring and scrubbing of pots and pans.
Her little brother, with shaven head and brown, naked, mud−covered limbs, follows after her and waits patiently on the high bank at her bidding.
She goes back home with the full pitcher poised on her head, the shining brass pot in her left hand, holding the child with her right—she the tiny servant of her mother, grave with the weight of the household cares.

One day I saw this naked boy sitting with legs outstretched.
In the water his sister sat rubbing a drinking−pot with a handful of earth, turning it round and round.
Near by a soft−haired lamb stood gazing along the bank.
It came close to where the boy sat and suddenly bleated aloud, and the child started up and screamed.
His sister left off cleaning her pot and ran up.
She took up her brother in one arm and the lamb in the other, and dividing her caresses between them bound in one bond of affection the offspring of beast and man.

78

It was in May. The sultry noon seemed endlessly long. The dry earth gaped with thirst in the heat.
When I heard from the riverside a voice calling, “Come, my darling!”
I shut my book and opened the window to look out.
I saw a big buffalo with mud−stained hide, standing near the river with placid, patient eyes; and a youth, knee deep in water, calling it to its bath.
I smiled amused and felt a touch of sweetness in my heart.

79

I often wonder where lie hidden the boundaries of recognition between man and the beast whose heart knows no spoken language.
Through what primal paradise in a remote morning of creation ran the simple path by which their hearts visited each other.

Those marks of their constant tread have not been effaced though
their kinship has been long forgotten.
Yet suddenly in some wordless music the dim memory wakes up and
the beast gazes into the man's face with a tender trust, and
the man looks down into its eyes with amused affection.
It seems that the two friends meet masked and vaguely know each
other through the disguise.

80

With a glance of your eyes you could plunder all the wealth of
songs struck from poets' harps, fair woman!
But for their praises you have no ear, therefore I come to praise
you.
You could humble at your feet the proudest heads in the world.
But it is your loved ones, unknown to fame, whom you choose to
worship, therefore I worship you.
The perfection of your arms would add glory to kingly splendour
with their touch.
But you use them to sweep away the dust, and to make clean your
humble home, therefore I am filled with awe.

81

Why do you whisper so faintly in my ears, O Death, my Death?
When the flowers droop in the evening and cattle come back to
their stalls, you stealthily come to my side and speak words
that I do not understand.
Is this how you must woo and win me with the opiate of drowsy
murmur and cold kisses, O Death, my Death?

Will there be no proud ceremony for our wedding?
Will you not tie up with a wreath your tawny coiled locks?
Is there none to carry your banner before you, and will not the
night be on fire with your red torch−lights, O Death, my Death?

Come with your conch−shells sounding, come in the sleepless
night.
Dress me with a crimson mantle, grasp my hand and take me.
Let your chariot be ready at my door with your horses neighing

impatiently.
Raise my veil and look at my face proudly, O Death, my Death!

82

We are to play the game of death to−night, my bride and I.
The night is black, the clouds in the sky are capricious, and the waves are raving at sea.
We have left our bed of dreams, flung open the door and come out, my bride and I.
We sit upon a swing, and the storm winds give us a wild push from behind.
My bride starts up with fear and delight, she trembles and clings to my breast.
Long have I served her tenderly.
I made for her a bed of flowers and I closed the doors to shut out the rude light from her eyes.
I kissed her gently on her lips and whispered softly in her ears till she half swooned in languor.
She was lost in the endless mist of vague sweetness.
She answered not to my touch, my songs failed to arouse her.
To−night has come to us the call of the storm from the wild.
My bride has shivered and stood up, she has clasped my hand and come out.
Her hair is flying in the wind, her veil is fluttering, her garland rustles over her breast.
The push of death has swung her into life.
We are face to face and heart to heart, my bride and I.

83

She dwelt on the hillside by the edge of a maize−field, near the spring that flows in laughing rills through the solemn shadows of ancient trees. The women came there to fill their jars, and travellers would sit there to rest and talk. She worked and dreamed daily to the tune of the bubbling stream.

One evening the stranger came down from the cloud−hidden peak; his locks were tangled like drowsy snakes. We asked in wonder, “Who are you?” He answered not but sat by the garrulous stream and silently gazed at the hut where she dwelt. Our hearts quaked in fear and we came back home when it was night.

Next morning when the women came to fetch water at the spring by the *deodar* trees, they found the doors open in her hut, but her voice was gone and where was her smiling face? The empty jar lay on the floor and her lamp had burnt itself out in the corner. No one knew where she had fled to before it was morning—and the stranger had gone.

In the month of May the sun grew strong and the snow melted, and we sat by the spring and wept. We wondered in our mind, “Is there a spring in the land where she has gone and where she can fill her vessel in these hot thirsty days?” And we asked each other in dismay, “Is there a land beyond these hills where we live?”

It was a summer night; the breeze blew from the south; and I sat in her deserted room where the lamp stood still unlit. When suddenly from before my eyes the hills vanished like curtains drawn aside. “Ah, it is she who comes. How are you, my child? Are you happy? But where can you shelter under this open sky? And, alas, our spring is not here to allay your thirst.”

“Here is the same sky,” she said, “only free from the fencing hills,—this is the same stream grown into a river,—the same earth widened into a plain.” “Everything is here,” I sighed, “only we are not.” She smiled sadly and said, “You are in my heart.” I woke up and heard the babbling of the stream and the rustling of the *deodars* at night.

84

Over the green and yellow rice−fields sweep the shadows of the autumn clouds followed by the swift chasing sun.
The bees forget to sip their honey; drunken with light they foolishly hover and hum.
The ducks in the islands of the river clamour in joy for mere nothing.
Let none go back home, brothers, this morning, let none go to work.

Let us take the blue sky by storm and plunder space as we run.
Laughter floats in the air like foam on the flood.
Brothers, let us squander our morning in futile songs.

85

Who are you, reader, reading my poems an hundred years hence?
I cannot send you one single flower from this wealth of the spring, one single streak of gold from yonder clouds.
Open your doors and look abroad.
From your blossoming garden gather fragrant memories of the vanished flowers of an hundred years before.
In the joy of your heart may you feel the living joy that sang one spring morning, sending its glad voice across an hundred years.

The Home and the World

R. Tagore

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The Home and the World

R. Tagore

Translated by Surendranath Tagore

Chapter One. Bimala's Story

I

MOTHER, today there comes back to mind the vermilion mark [1] at the parting of your hair, the *sari* [2] which you used to wear, with its wide red border, and those wonderful eyes of yours, full of depth and peace. They came at the start of my life's journey, like the first streak of dawn, giving me golden provision to carry me on my way.

The sky which gives light is blue, and my mother's face was dark, but she had the radiance of holiness, and her beauty would put to shame all the vanity of the beautiful.

Everyone says that I resemble my mother. In my childhood I used to resent this. It made me angry with my mirror. I thought that it was God's unfairness which was wrapped round my limbs that my dark features were not my due, but had come to me by some misunderstanding. All that remained for me to ask of my God in reparation was, that I might grow up to be a model of what woman should be, as one reads it in some epic poem.

When the proposal came for my marriage, an astrologer was sent, who consulted my palm and said, "This girl has good signs. She will become an ideal wife."

And all the women who heard it said: "No wonder, for she resembles her mother."

I was married into a Rajah's house. When I was a child, I was quite familiar with the description of the Prince of the fairy story. But my husband's face was not of a kind that one's imagination would place in fairyland. It was dark, even as mine was. The feeling of shrinking, which I had about my own lack of physical beauty, was lifted a little; at the same time a touch of regret was left lingering in my heart.

But when the physical appearance evades the scrutiny of our senses and enters the sanctuary of our hearts, then it can forget itself. I know, from my childhood's experience, how devotion is beauty itself, in its inner aspect. When my mother arranged the different fruits, carefully peeled by her own loving hands, on the white stone plate, and gently waved her fan to drive away the flies while my father sat down to his meals, her service would lose itself in a beauty which passed beyond outward forms. Even in my infancy I could feel its power. It transcended all debates, or doubts, or calculations: it was pure music.

I distinctly remember after my marriage, when, early in the morning, I would cautiously and silently get up and take the dust [3] of my husband's feet without waking him, how at such moments I could feel the vermilion mark upon my forehead shining out like the morning star.

One day, he happened to awake, and smiled as he asked me: "What is that, Bimala? What *are* you doing?"

I can never forget the shame of being detected by him. He might possibly have thought that I was trying to earn merit secretly. But no, no! That had nothing to do with merit. It was my woman's heart, which must worship in order to love.

My father−in−law's house was old in dignity from the days of the *Badshahs*. Some of its manners were of the Moguls and Pathans, some of its customs of Manu and Parashar. But my husband was absolutely modern. He was the first of the house to go through a college course and take his M.A. degree. His elder brother had died young, of drink, and had left no children. My husband did not drink and was not given to dissipation. So foreign to the family was this abstinence, that to many it hardly seemed decent! Purity, they imagined, was only becoming in those on whom fortune had not smiled. It is the moon which has room for stains, not the stars.

My husband's parents had died long ago, and his old grandmother was mistress of the house. My husband was the apple of her eye, the jewel on her bosom. And so he never met with much difficulty in overstepping any of the ancient usages. When he brought in Miss Gilby, to teach me and be my companion, he stuck to his resolve in spite of the poison secreted by all the wagging tongues at home and outside.

My husband had then just got through his B.A. examination and was reading for his M.A. degree; so he had to stay in Calcutta to attend college. He used to write to me almost every day, a few lines only, and simple words, but his bold, round handwriting would look up into my face, oh, so tenderly! I kept his letters in a sandalwood box and covered them every day with the flowers I gathered in the garden.

At that time the Prince of the fairy tale had faded, like the moon in the morning light. I had the Prince of my real world enthroned in my heart. I was his queen. I had my seat by his side. But my real joy was, that my true place was at his feet.

Since then, I have been educated, and introduced to the modern age in its own language, and therefore these words that I write seem to blush with shame in their prose setting. Except for my acquaintance with this modern standard of life, I should know, quite naturally, that just as my being born a woman was not in my own hands, so the element of devotion in woman's love is not like a hackneyed passage quoted from a romantic poem to be piously written down in round hand in a school−girl's copy−book.

But my husband would not give me any opportunity for worship. That was his greatness. They are cowards who claim absolute devotion from their wives as their right; that is a humiliation for both.

His love for me seemed to overflow my limits by its flood of wealth and service. But my necessity was more for giving than for receiving; for love is a vagabond, who can make his flowers bloom in the wayside dust, better than in the crystal jars kept in the drawing−room.

My husband could not break completely with the old−time traditions which prevailed in our family. It was difficult, therefore, for us to meet at any hour of the day we pleased. [4] I knew exactly the time that he could come to me, and therefore our meeting had all the care of loving preparation. It was like the rhyming of a poem; it had to come through the path of the metre.

After finishing the day's work and taking my afternoon bath, I would do up my hair and renew my vermilion mark and put on my *sari*, carefully crinkled; and then, bringing back my body and mind from all distractions of household duties, I would dedicate it at this special hour, with special ceremonies, to one individual. That time, each day, with him was short; but it was infinite.

My husband used to say, that man and wife are equal in love because of their equal claim on each other. I never argued the point with him, but my heart said that devotion never stands in the way of true equality; it only raises the level of the ground of meeting. Therefore the joy of the higher equality remains permanent; it never slides down to the vulgar level of triviality.

My beloved, it was worthy of you that you never expected worship from me. But if you had accepted it, you would have done me a real service. You showed your love by decorating me, by educating me, by giving me what I asked for, and what I did not. I have seen what depth of love there was in your eyes when you gazed at me. I have known the secret sigh of pain you suppressed in your love for me. You loved my body as if it were a flower of paradise. You loved my whole nature as if it had been given you by some rare providence.

Such lavish devotion made me proud to think that the wealth was all my own which drove you to my gate. But vanity such as this only checks the flow of free surrender in a woman's love. When I sit on the queen's throne and claim homage, then the claim only goes on magnifying itself; it is never satisfied. Can there be any real happiness for a woman in merely feeling that she has power over a man? To surrender one's pride in devotion is woman's only salvation.

It comes back to me today how, in the days of our happiness, the fires of envy sprung up all around us. That was only natural, for had I not stepped into my good fortune by a mere chance, and without deserving it? But providence does not allow a run of luck to last for ever, unless its debt of honour be fully paid, day by day, through many a long day, and thus made secure. God may grant us gifts, but the merit of being able to take and hold them must be our own. Alas for the boons that slip through unworthy hands!

My husband's grandmother and mother were both renowned for their beauty. And my widowed sister−in−law

was also of a beauty rarely to be seen. When, in turn, fate left them desolate, the grandmother vowed she would not insist on having beauty for her remaining grandson when he married. Only the auspicious marks with which I was endowed gained me an entry into this family otherwise, I had no claim to be here.

In this house of luxury, but few of its ladies had received their meed of respect. They had, however, got used to the ways of the family, and managed to keep their heads above water, buoyed up by their dignity as *Ranis* of an ancient house, in spite of their daily tears being drowned in the foam of wine, and by the tinkle of the dancing girls" anklets. Was the credit due to me that my husband did not touch liquor, nor squander his manhood in the markets of woman's flesh? What charm did I know to soothe the wild and wandering mind of men? It was my good luck, nothing else. For fate proved utterly callous to my sister−in−law. Her festivity died out, while yet the evening was early, leaving the light of her beauty shining in vain over empty halls burning and burning, with no accompanying music!

His sister−in−law affected a contempt for my husband's modern notions. How absurd to keep the family ship, laden with all the weight of its time−honoured glory, sailing under the colours of his slip of a girl−wife alone! Often have I felt the lash of scorn. "A thief who had stolen a husband's love!" "A sham hidden in the shamelessness of her new−fangled finery!" The many−coloured garments of modern fashion with which my husband loved to adorn me roused jealous wrath. "Is not she ashamed to make a show−window of herself and with her looks, too!"

My husband was aware of all this, but his gentleness knew no bounds. He used to implore me to forgive her.

I remember I once told him: "Women's minds are so petty. so crooked!" "Like the feet of Chinese women," he replied. "Has not the pressure of society cramped them into pettiness and crookedness? They are but pawns of the fate which gambles with them. What responsibility have they of their own?"

My sister−in−law never failed to get from my husband whatever she wanted. He did not stop to consider whether her requests were right or reasonable. But what exasperated me most was that she was not grateful for this. I had promised my husband that I would not talk back at her, but this set me raging all the more, inwardly. I used to feel that goodness has a limit, which, if passed, somehow seems to make men cowardly. Shall I tell the whole truth? I have often wished that my husband had the manliness to be a little less good.

My sister−in−law, the Bara Rani, [5] was still young and had no pretensions to saintliness. Rather, her talk and jest and laugh inclined to be forward. The young maids with whom she surrounded herself were also impudent to a degree. But there was none to gainsay her for was not this the custom of the house? It seemed to me that my good fortune in having a stainless husband was a special eyesore to her. He, however, felt more the sorrow of her lot than the defects of her character.

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1. The mark of Hindu wifehood and the symbol of all the devotion that it implies.

2. The *sari* is the dress of the Hindu woman.

3. Taking the dust of the feet is a formal offering of reverence and is done by lightly touching the feet of the revered one and then one's own head with the same hand. The wife does not ordinarily do this to the husband.

4. It would not be reckoned good form for the husband to be continually going into the zenana, except at particular hours for meals or rest.

5. *Bara* = Senior; *Chota* = Junior. In joint families of rank, though the widows remain entitled only to a

life−interest in their husbands' share, their rank remains to them according to seniority, and the titles "Senior" and "Junior" continue to distinguish the elder and younger branches, even though the junior branch be the one in power.

II

My husband was very eager to take me out of *purdah*. [6]

One day I said to him: "What do I want with the outside world?"

"The outside world may want you," he replied.

"If the outside world has got on so long without me, it may go on for some time longer. It need not pine to death for want of me."

"Let it perish, for all I care! That is not troubling me. I am thinking about myself."

"Oh, indeed. Tell me what about yourself?"

My husband was silent, with a smile.

I knew his way, and protested at once: "No, no, you are not going to run away from me like that! I want to have this out with you."

"Can one ever finish a subject with words?"

"Do stop speaking in riddles. Tell me. . ."

"What I want is, that I should have you, and you should have me, more fully in the outside world. That is where we are still in debt to each other."

"Is anything wanting, then, in the love we have here at home?"

"Here you are wrapped up in me. You know neither what you have, nor what you want."

"I cannot bear to hear you talk like this."

"I would have you come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality. Merely going on with your household duties, living all your life in the world of household conventions and the drudgery of household tasks you were not made for that! If we meet, and recognize each other, in the real world, then only will our love be true."

"If there be any drawback here to our full recognition of each other, then I have nothing to say. But as for myself, I feel no want."

"Well, even if the drawback is only on my side, why shouldn't you help to remove it?"

Such discussions repeatedly occurred. One day he said: "The greedy man who is fond of his fish stew has no compunction in cutting up the fish according to his need. But the man who loves the fish wants to enjoy it in the water; and if that is impossible he waits on the bank; and even if he comes back home without a sight of it he has the consolation of knowing that the fish is all right. Perfect gain is the best of all; but if that is

impossible, then the next best gain is perfect losing.

I never liked the way my husband had of talking on this subject, but that is not the reason why I refused to leave the zenana. His grandmother was still alive. My husband had filled more than a hundred and twenty per cent of the house with the twentieth century, against her taste; but she had borne it uncomplaining. She would have borne it, likewise, if the daughter−in−law [7] of the Rajah's house had left its seclusion. She was even prepared for this happening. But I did not consider it important enough to give her the pain of it. I have read in books that we are called "caged birds". I cannot speak for others, but I had so much in this cage of mine that there was not room for it in the universe at least that is what I then felt.

The grandmother, in her old age, was very fond of me. At the bottom of her fondness was the thought that, with the conspiracy of favourable stars which attended me, I had been able to attract my husband's love. Were not men naturally inclined to plunge downwards? None of the others, for all their beauty, had been able to prevent their husbands going headlong into the burning depths which consumed and destroyed them. She believed that I had been the means of extinguishing this fire, so deadly to the men of the family. So she kept me in the shelter of her bosom, and trembled if I was in the least bit unwell.

His grandmother did not like the dresses and ornaments my husband brought from European shops to deck me with. But she reflected: "Men will have some absurd hobby or other, which is sure to be expensive. It is no use trying to check their extravagance; one is glad enough if they stop short of ruin. If my Nikhil had not been busy dressing up his wife there is no knowing whom else he might have spent his money on!" So whenever any new dress of mine arrived she used to send for my husband and make merry over it.

Thus it came about that it was her taste which changed. The influence of the modern age fell so strongly upon her, that her evenings refused to pass if I did not tell her stories out of English books.

After his grandmother's death, my husband wanted me to go and live with him in Calcutta. But I could not bring myself to do that. Was not this our House, which she had kept under her sheltering care through all her trials and troubles? Would not a curse come upon me if I deserted it and went off to town? This was the thought that kept me back, as her empty seat reproachfully looked up at me. That noble lady had come into this house at the age of eight, and had died in her seventy−ninth year. She had not spent a happy life. Fate had hurled shaft after shaft at her breast, only to draw out more and more the imperishable spirit within. This great house was hallowed with her tears. What should I do in the dust of Calcutta, away from it?

My husband's idea was that this would be a good opportunity for leaving to my sister−in−law the consolation of ruling over the household, giving our life, at the same time, more room to branch out in Calcutta. That is just where my difficulty came in. She had worried my life out, she ill brooked my husband's happiness, and for this she was to be rewarded! And what of the day when we should have to come back here? Should I then get back my seat at the head?

"What do you want with that seat?" my husband would say. "Are there not more precious things in life?"

Men never understand these things. They have their nests in the outside world; they little know the whole of what the household stands for. In these matters they ought to follow womanly guidance. Such were my thoughts at that time.

I felt the real point was, that one ought to stand up for one's rights. To go away, and leave everything in the hands of the enemy, would be nothing short of owning defeat.

But why did not my husband compel me to go with him to Calcutta? I know the reason. He did not use his power, just because he had it.

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6. The seclusion of the zenana, and all the customs peculiar to it, are designated by the general term "Purdah", which means Screen.

7. The prestige of the daughter−in−law is of the first importance in a Hindu household of rank [Trans.].

III

IF one had to fill in, little by little, the gap between day and night, it would take an eternity to do it. But the sun rises and the darkness is dispelled a moment is sufficient to overcome an infinite distance.

One day there came the new era of *Swadeshi* [8] in Bengal; but as to how it happened, we had no distinct vision. There was no gradual slope connecting the past with the present. For that reason, I imagine, the new epoch came in like a flood, breaking down the dykes and sweeping all our prudence and fear before it. We had no time even to think about, or understand, what had happened, or what was about to happen.

My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age. Though, up to this time, the walls of the home which was the ultimate world to my mind remained unbroken, yet I stood looking over into the distance, and I heard a voice from the far horizon, whose meaning was not perfectly clear to me, but whose call went straight to my heart.

From the time my husband had been a college student he had been trying to get the things required by our people produced in our own country. There are plenty of date trees in our district. He tried to invent an apparatus for extracting the juice and boiling it into sugar and treacle. I heard that it was a great success, only it extracted more money than juice. After a while he came to the conclusion that our attempts at reviving our industries were not succeeding for want of a bank of our own. He was, at the time, trying to teach me political economy. This alone would not have done much harm, but he also took it into his head to teach his countrymen ideas of thrift, so as to pave the way for a bank; and then he actually started a small bank. Its high rate of interest, which made the villagers flock so enthusiastically to put in their money, ended by swamping the bank altogether.

The old officers of the estate felt troubled and frightened. There was jubilation in the enemy's camp. Of all the family, only my husband's grandmother remained unmoved. She would scold me, saying: "Why are you all plaguing him so? Is it the fate of the estate that is worrying you? How many times have I seen this estate in the hands of the court receiver! Are men like women? Men are born spendthrifts and only know how to waste. Look here, child, count yourself fortunate that your husband is not wasting himself as well!"

My husband's list of charities was a long one. He would assist to the bitter end of utter failure anyone who wanted to invent a new loom or rice−husking machine. But what annoyed me most was the way that Sandip Babu [9] used to fleece him on the pretext of *Swadeshi* work. Whenever he wanted to start a newspaper, or travel about preaching the Cause, or take a change of air by the advice of his doctor, my husband would unquestioningly supply him with the money. This was over and above the regular living allowance which Sandip Babu also received from him. The strangest part of it was that my husband and Sandip Babu did not agree in their opinions.

As soon as the *Swadeshi* storm reached my blood, I said to my husband: "I must burn all my foreign clothes."

"Why burn them?" said he. "You need not wear them as long as you please."

"As long as I please! Not in this life . . ."

"Very well, do not wear them for the rest of your life, then. But why this bonfire business?"

"Would you thwart me in my resolve?"

"What I want to say is this: Why not try to build up something? You should not waste even a tenth part of your energies in this destructive excitement."

"Such excitement will give us the energy to build."

"That is as much as to say, that you cannot light the house unless you set fire to it."

Then there came another trouble. When Miss Gilby first came to our house there was a great flutter, which afterwards calmed down when they got used to her. Now the whole thing was stirred up afresh. I had never bothered myself before as to whether Miss Gilby was European or Indian, but I began to do so now. I said to my husband: "We must get rid of Miss Gilby."

He kept silent.

I talked to him wildly, and he went away sad at heart.

After a fit of weeping, I felt in a more reasonable mood when we met at night. "I cannot," my husband said, "look upon Miss Gilby through a mist of abstraction, just because she is English. Cannot you get over the barrier of her name after such a long acquaintance? Cannot you realize that she loves you?"

I felt a little ashamed and replied with some sharpness: "Let her remain. I am not over anxious to send her away." And Miss Gilby remained.

But one day I was told that she had been insulted by a young fellow on her way to church. This was a boy whom we were supporting. My husband turned him out of the house. There was not a single soul, that day, who could forgive my husband for that act not even I. This time Miss Gilby left of her own accord. She shed tears when she came to say good−bye, but my mood would not melt. To slander the poor boy so and such a fine boy, too, who would forget his daily bath and food in his enthusiasm for *Swadeshi*.

My husband escorted Miss Gilby to the railway station in his own carriage. I was sure he was going too far. When exaggerated accounts of the incident gave rise to a public scandal, which found its way to the newspapers, I felt he had been rightly served.

I had often become anxious at my husband's doings, but had never before been ashamed; yet now I had to blush for him! I did not know exactly, nor did I care, what wrong poor Noren might, or might not, have done to Miss Gilby, but the idea of sitting in judgement on such a matter at such a time! I should have refused to damp the spirit which prompted young Noren to defy the Englishwoman. I could not but look upon it as a sign of cowardice in my husband, that he should fail to understand this simple thing. And so I blushed for him.

And yet it was not that my husband refused to support *Swadeshi* , or was in any way against the Cause. Only he had not been able whole−heartedly to accept the spirit of *Bande Mataram*. [10]

"I am willing," he said, "to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it."

8. The Nationalist movement, which began more as an economic than a political one, having as its main object the encouragement of indigenous industries [Trans.].

9. "Babu" is a term of respect, like "Father" or "Mister," but has also meant in colonial days a person who understands some English. [on−line ed.]

10. Lit.: "Hail Mother"; the opening words of a song by Bankim Chatterjee, the famous Bengali novelist. The song has now become the national anthem, and *Bande Mataram* the national cry, since the days of the *Swadeshi* movement [Trans.].

Chapter Two

Bimala's Story

IV

THIS was the time when Sandip Babu with his followers came to our neighbourhood to preach *Swadeshi*.

There is to be a big meeting in our temple pavilion. We women are sitting there, on one side, behind a screen. Triumphant shouts of *Bande Mataram* come nearer: and to them I am thrilling through and through. Suddenly a stream of barefooted youths in turbans, clad in ascetic ochre, rushes into the quadrangle, like a silt−reddened freshet into a dry river−bed at the first burst of the rains. The whole place is filled with an immense crowd, through which Sandip Babu is borne, seated in a big chair hoisted on the shoulders of ten or twelve of the youths.

Bande Mataram! *Bande Mataram*! *Bande Mataram*! It seems as though the skies would be rent and scattered into a thousand fragments.

I had seen Sandip Babu's photograph before. There was something in his features which I did not quite like. Not that he was bad−looking far from it: he had a splendidly handsome face. Yet, I know not why, it seemed to me, in spite of all its brilliance, that too much of base alloy had gone into its making. The light in his eyes somehow did not shine true. That was why I did not like it when my husband unquestioningly gave in to all his demands. I could bear the waste of money; but it vexed me to think that he was imposing on my husband, taking advantage of friendship. His bearing was not that of an ascetic, nor even of a person of moderate means, but foppish all over. Love of comfort seemed to . . . any number of such reflections come back to me today, but let them be.

When, however, Sandip Babu began to speak that afternoon, and the hearts of the crowd swayed and surged to his words, as though they would break all bounds, I saw him wonderfully transformed. Especially when his features were suddenly lit up by a shaft of light from the slowly setting sun, as it sunk below the roof−line of the pavilion, he seemed to me to be marked out by the gods as their messenger to mortal men and women.

From beginning to end of his speech, each one of his utterances was a stormy outburst. There was no limit to the confidence of his assurance. I do not know how it happened, but I found I had impatiently pushed away the screen from before me and had fixed my gaze upon him. Yet there was none in that crowd who paid any heed to my doings. Only once, I noticed, his eyes, like stars in fateful Orion, flashed full on my face.

I was utterly unconscious of myself. I was no longer the lady of the Rajah's house, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood. And he was the champion of Bengal. As the sky had shed its light over him, so he must receive the consecration of a woman's benediction . . .

It seemed clear to me that, since he had caught sight of me, the fire in his words had flamed up more fiercely. Indra's [11] steed refused to be reined in, and there came the roar of thunder and the flash of lightning. I said within myself that his language had caught fire from my eyes; for we women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself.

I returned home that evening radiant with a new pride and joy. The storm within me had shifted my whole being from one centre to another. Like the Greek maidens of old, I fain would cut off my long, resplendent tresses to make a bowstring for my hero. Had my outward ornaments been connected with my inner feelings, then my necklet, my armlets, my bracelets, would all have burst their bonds and flung themselves over that assembly like a shower of meteors. Only some personal sacrifice, I felt, could help me to bear the tumult of my exaltation.

When my husband came home later, I was trembling lest he should utter a sound out of tune with the triumphant paean which was still ringing in my ears, lest his fanaticism for truth should lead him to express disapproval of anything that had been said that afternoon. For then I should have openly defied and humiliated him. But he did not say a word . . . which I did not like either.

He should have said: "Sandip has brought me to my senses. I now realize how mistaken I have been all this time."

I somehow felt that he was spitefully silent, that he obstinately refused to be enthusiastic. I asked how long Sandip Babu was going to be with us.

"He is off to Rangpur early tomorrow morning," said my husband.

"Must it be tomorrow?"

"Yes, he is already engaged to speak there."

I was silent for a while and then asked again: "Could he not possibly stay a day longer?"

"That may hardly be possible, but why?"

"I want to invite him to dinner and attend on him myself."

My husband was surprised. He had often entreated me to be present when he had particular friends to dinner, but I had never let myself be persuaded. He gazed at me curiously, in silence, with a look I did not quite understand.

I was suddenly overcome with a sense of shame. "No, no," I exclaimed, "that would never do!"

"Why not!" said he. "I will ask him myself, and if it is at all possible he will surely stay on for tomorrow."

It turned out to be quite possible.

I will tell the exact truth. That day I reproached my Creator because he had not made me surpassingly beautiful not to steal any heart away, but because beauty is glory. In this great day the men of the country should realize its goddess in its womanhood. But, alas, the eyes of men fail to discern the goddess, if outward beauty be lacking. Would Sandip Babu find the *Shakti* of the Motherland manifest in me? Or would he simply take me to be an ordinary, domestic woman?

That morning I scented my flowing hair and tied it in a loose knot, bound by a cunningly intertwined red silk ribbon. Dinner, you see, was to be served at midday, and there was no time to dry my hair after my bath and do it up plaited in the ordinary way. I put on a gold−bordered white *sari*, and my short−sleeve muslin jacket was also gold−bordered.

I felt that there was a certain restraint about my costume and that nothing could well have been simpler. But my sister−in−law, who happened to be passing by, stopped dead before me, surveyed me from head to foot and with compressed lips smiled a meaning smile. When I asked her the reason, "I am admiring your get−up!" she said.

"What is there so entertaining about it?" I enquired, considerably annoyed.

"It's superb," she said. "I was only thinking that one of those low−necked English bodices would have made it perfect." Not only her mouth and eyes, but her whole body seemed to ripple with suppressed laughter as she left the room.

I was very, very angry, and wanted to change everything and put on my everyday clothes. But I cannot tell exactly why I could not carry out my impulse. Women are the ornaments of society thus I reasoned with myself and my husband would never like it, if I appeared before Sandip Babu unworthily clad.

My idea had been to make my appearance after they had sat down to dinner. In the bustle of looking after the serving the first awkwardness would have passed off. But dinner was not ready in time, and it was getting late. Meanwhile my husband had sent for me to introduce the guest.

I was feeling horribly shy about looking Sandip Babu in the face. However, I managed to recover myself enough to say: "I am so sorry dinner is getting late."

He boldly came and sat right beside me as he replied: "I get a dinner of some kind every day, but the Goddess of Plenty keeps behind the scenes. Now that the goddess herself has appeared, it matters little if the dinner lags behind."

He was just as emphatic in his manners as he was in his public speaking. He had no hesitation and seemed to be accustomed to occupy, unchallenged, his chosen seat. He claimed the right to intimacy so confidently, that the blame would seem to belong to those who should dispute it.

I was in terror lest Sandip Babu should take me for a shrinking, old−fashioned bundle of inanity. But, for the life of me, I could not sparkle in repartees such as might charm or dazzle him. What could have possessed me, I angrily wondered, to appear before him in such an absurd way?

I was about to retire when dinner was over, but Sandip Babu, as bold as ever, placed himself in my way.

"You must not," he said, "think me greedy. It was not the dinner that kept me staying on, it was your invitation. If you were to run away now, that would not be playing fair with your guest."

If he had not said these words with a careless ease, they would have been out of tune. But, after all, he was such a great friend of my husband that I was like his sister.

While I was struggling to climb up this high wave of intimacy, my husband came to the rescue, saying: "Why not come back to us after you have taken your dinner?"

"But you must give your word," said Sandip Babu, "before we let you off."

"I will come," said I, with a slight smile.

"Let me tell you," continued Sandip Babu, "why I cannot trust you. Nikhil has been married these nine years, and all this while you have eluded me. If you do this again for another nine years, we shall never meet again."

I took up the spirit of his remark as I dropped my voice to reply: "Why even then should we not meet?"

"My horoscope tells me I am to die early. None of my forefathers have survived their thirtieth year. I am now twenty−seven."

He knew this would go home. This time there must have been a shade of concern in my low voice as I said: "The blessings of the whole country are sure to avert the evil influence of the stars."

"Then the blessings of the country must be voiced by its goddess. This is the reason for my anxiety that you should return, so that my talisman may begin to work from today."

Sandip Babu had such a way of taking things by storm that I got no opportunity of resenting what I never should have permitted in another.

"So," he concluded with a laugh, "I am going to hold this husband of yours as a hostage till you come back."

As I was coming away, he exclaimed: "May I trouble you for a trifle?"

I started and turned round.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "It's merely a glass of water. You might have noticed that I did not drink any water with my dinner. I take it a little later."

Upon this I had to make a show of interest and ask him the reason. He began to give the history of his dyspepsia. I was told how he had been a martyr to it for seven months, and how, after the usual course of nuisances, which included different allopathic and homoeopathic misadventures, he had obtained the most wonderful results by indigenous methods.

"Do you know," he added, with a smile, "God has built even my infirmities in such a manner that they yield only under the bombardment of *Swadeshi* pills."

My husband, at this, broke his silence. "You must confess," said he, "that you have as immense an attraction for foreign medicine as the earth has for meteors. You have three shelves in your sitting−room full of. . ."

Sandip Babu broke in: "Do you know what they are? They are the punitive police. They come, not because they are wanted, but because they are imposed on us by the rule of this modern age, exacting fines and−inflicting injuries."

My husband could not bear exaggerations, and I could see he disliked this. But all ornaments are exaggerations. They are not made by God, but by man. Once I remember in defence of some untruth of mine I said to my husband: "Only the trees and beasts and birds tell unmitigated truths, because these poor things have not the power to invent. In this men show their superiority to the lower creatures, and women beat even men. Neither is a profusion of ornament unbecoming for a woman, nor a profusion of untruth."

As I came out into the passage leading to the zenana I found my sister−in−law, standing near a window overlooking the reception rooms, peeping through the venetian shutter.

"You here?" I asked in surprise.

"Eavesdropping!" she replied.

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11. The Jupiter Pluvius of Hindu mythology.

V

When I returned, Sandip Babu was tenderly apologetic. "I am afraid we have spoilt your appetite," he said.

I felt greatly ashamed. Indeed, I had been too indecently quick over my dinner. With a little calculation, it would become quite evident that my non−eating had surpassed the eating. But I had no idea that anyone could have been deliberately calculating.

I suppose Sandip Babu detected my feeling of shame, which only augmented it. "I was sure," he said, "that you had the impulse of the wild deer to run away, but it is a great boon that you took the trouble to keep your promise with me."

I could not think of any suitable reply and so I sat down, blushing and uncomfortable, at one end of the sofa. The vision that I had of myself, as the *Shakti* of Womanhood, incarnate, crowning Sandip Babu simply with my presence, majestic and unashamed, failed me altogether.

Sandip Babu deliberately started a discussion with my husband. He knew that his keen wit flashed to the best effect in an argument. I have often since observed, that he never lost an opportunity for a passage at arms whenever I happened to be present.

He was familiar with my husband's views on the cult of *Bande Mataram*, and began in a provoking way: "So you do not allow that there is room for an appeal to the imagination in patriotic work?"

"It has its place, Sandip, I admit, but I do not believe in giving it the whole place. I would know my country in its frank reality, and for this I am both afraid and ashamed to make use of hypnotic texts of patriotism."

"What you call hypnotic texts I call truth. I truly believe my country to be my God. I worship Humanity. God manifests Himself both in man and in his country."

"If that is what you really believe, there should be no difference for you between man and man, and so between country and country."

"Quite true. But my powers are limited, so my worship of Humanity is continued in the worship of my country."

"I have nothing against your worship as such, but how is it you propose to conduct your worship of God by hating other countries in which He is equally manifest?"

"Hate is also an adjunct of worship. Arjuna won Mahadeva's favour by wrestling with him. God will be with us in the end, if we are prepared to give Him battle."

"If that be so, then those who are serving and those who are harming the country are both His devotees. Why, then, trouble to preach patriotism?"

"In the case of one's own country, it is different. There the heart clearly demands worship."

"If you push the same argument further you can say that since God is manifested in us, our *self* has to be worshipped before all else; because our natural instinct claims it."

"Look here, Nikhil, this is all merely dry logic. Can't you recognize that there is such a thing as feeling?"

"I tell you the truth, Sandip," my husband replied. "It is my feelings that are outraged, whenever you try to pass off injustice as a duty, and unrighteousness as a moral ideal. The fact, that I am incapable of stealing, is not due to my possessing logical faculties, but to my having some feeling of respect for myself and love for ideals."

I was raging inwardly. At last I could keep silent no longer. "Is not the history of every country," I cried, "whether England, France, Germany, or Russia, the history of stealing for the sake of one's own country?"

"They have to answer for these thefts; they are doing so even now; their history is not yet ended."

"At any rate," interposed Sandip Babu, "why should we not follow suit? Let us first fill our country's coffers with stolen goods and then take centuries, like these other countries, to answer for them, if we must. But, I ask you, where do you find this 'answering' in history?"

"When Rome was answering for her sin no one knew it. All that time, there was apparently no limit to her prosperity. But do you not see one thing: how these political bags of theirs are bursting with lies and treacheries, breaking their backs under their weight?"

Never before had I had any opportunity of being present at a discussion between my husband and his men friends. Whenever he argued with me I could feel his reluctance to push me into a corner. This arose out of the very love he bore me. Today for the first time I saw his fencer's skill in debate.

Nevertheless, my heart refused to accept my husband's position. I was struggling to find some answer, but it would not come. When the word "righteousness" comes into an argument, it sounds ugly to say that a thing can be too good to be useful.

All of a sudden Sandip Babu turned to me with the question: "What do *you* say to this?"

"I do not care about fine distinctions," I broke out. "I will tell you broadly what I feel. I am only human. I am covetous. I would have good things for my country. If I am obliged, I would snatch them and filch them. I have anger. I would be angry for my country's sake. If necessary, I would smite and slay to avenge her insults. I have my desire to be fascinated, and fascination must be supplied to me in bodily shape by my country. She must have some visible symbol casting its spell upon my mind. I would make my country a Person, and call her Mother, Goddess, Durga for whom I would redden the earth with sacrificial offerings. I am human, not divine."

Sandip Babu leapt to his feet with uplifted arms and shouted "Hurrah!" The next moment he corrected himself and cried: "*Bande Mataram*."

A shadow of pain passed over the face of my husband. He said to me in a very gentle voice: "Neither am I divine: I am human. And therefore I dare not permit the evil which is in me to be exaggerated into an image of my country never, never!"

Sandip Babu cried out: "See, Nikhil, how in the heart of a woman Truth takes flesh and blood. Woman knows

how to be cruel: her virulence is like a blind storm. It is beautifully fearful. In man it is ugly, because it harbours in its centre the gnawing worms of reason and thought. I tell you, Nikhil, it is our women who will save the country. This is not the time for nice scruples. We must be unswervingly, unreasoningly brutal. We must sin. We must give our women red sandal paste with which to anoint and enthrone our sin. Don't you remember what the poet says:

> Come, Sin, O beautiful Sin,
> Let thy stinging red kisses pour down fiery red wine into our blood.
> Sound the trumpet of imperious evil
> And cross our forehead with the wreath of exulting lawlessness,
> O Deity of Desecration,
> Smear our breasts with the blackest mud of disrepute, unashamed.

Down with that righteousness, which cannot smilingly bring rack and ruin."

When Sandip Babu, standing with his head high, insulted at a moment's impulse all that men have cherished as their highest, in all countries and in all times, a shiver went right through my body.

But, with a stamp of his foot, he continued his declamation: "I can see that you are that beautiful spirit of fire, which burns the home to ashes and lights up the larger world with its flame. Give to us the indomitable courage to go to the bottom of Ruin itself. Impart grace to all that is baneful."

It was not clear to whom Sandip Babu addressed his last appeal. It might have been She whom he worshipped with his *Bande Mataram*. It might have been the Womanhood of his country. Or it might have been its representative, the woman before him. He would have gone further in the same strain, but my husband suddenly rose from his seat and touched him lightly on the shoulder saying: "Sandip, Chandranath Babu is here."

I started and turned round, to find an aged gentleman at the door, calm and dignified, in doubt as to whether he should come in or retire. His face was touched with a gentle light like that of the setting sun.

My husband came up to me and whispered: "This is my master, of whom I have so often told you. Make your obeisance to him."

I bent reverently and took the dust of his feet. He gave me his blessing saying: "May God protect you always, my little mother." I was sorely in need of such a blessing at that moment.

Nikhil's Story

I

One day I had the faith to believe that I should be able to bear whatever came from my God. I never had the trial. Now I think it has come.

I used to test my strength of mind by imagining all kinds of evil which might happen to me poverty, imprisonment, dishonour, death even Bimala's. And when I said to myself that I should be able to receive these with firmness, I am sure I did not exaggerate. Only I could never even imagine one thing, and today it is that of which I am thinking, and wondering whether I can really bear it. There is a thorn somewhere pricking in my heart, constantly giving me pain while I am about my daily work. It seems to persist even when I am asleep. The very moment I wake up in the morning, I find that the bloom has gone from the face of the sky.

What is it? What has happened?

My mind has become so sensitive, that even my past life, which came to me in the disguise of happiness, seems to wring my very heart with its falsehood; and the shame and sorrow which are coming close to me are losing their cover of privacy, all the more because they try to veil their faces. My heart has become all eyes. The things that should not be seen, the things I do not want to see these I must see.

The day has come at last when my ill−starred life has to reveal its destitution in a long−drawn series of exposures. This penury, all unexpected, has taken its seat in the heart where plenitude seemed to reign. The fees which I paid to delusion for just nine years of my youth have now to be returned with interest to Truth till the end of my days.

What is the use of straining to keep up my pride? What harm if I confess that I have something lacking in me? Possibly it is that unreasoning forcefulness which women love to find in men. But is strength mere display of muscularity? Must strength have no scruples in treading the weak underfoot?

But why all these arguments? Worthiness cannot be earned merely by disputing about it. And I am unworthy, unworthy, unworthy.

What if I am unworthy? The true value of love is this, that it can ever bless the unworthy with its own prodigality. For the worthy there are many rewards on God's earth, but God has specially reserved love for the unworthy.

Up till now Bimala was my home−made Bimala, the product of the confined space and the daily routine of small duties. Did the love which I received from her, I asked myself, come from the deep spring of her heart, or was it merely like the daily provision of pipe water pumped up by the municipal steam−engine of society?

I longed to find Bimala blossoming fully in all her truth and power. But the thing I forgot to calculate was, that one must give up all claims based on conventional rights, if one would find a person freely revealed in truth.

Why did I fail to think of this? Was it because of the husband's pride of possession over his wife? No. It was because I placed the fullest trust upon love. I was vain enough to think that I had the power in me to bear the sight of truth in its awful nakedness. It was tempting Providence, but still I clung to my proud determination to come out victorious in the trial.

Bimala had failed to understand me in one thing. She could not fully realize that I held as weakness all imposition of force. Only the weak dare not be just. They shirk their responsibility of fairness and try quickly to get at results through the short−cuts of injustice. Bimala has no patience with patience. She loves to find in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust. Her respect must have its element of fear.

I had hoped that when Bimala found herself free in the outer world she would be rescued from her infatuation for tyranny. But now I feel sure that this infatuation is deep down in her nature. Her love is for the boisterous. From the tip of her tongue to the pit of her stomach she must tingle with red pepper in order to enjoy the simple fare of life. But my determination was, never to do my duty with frantic impetuosity, helped on by the fiery liquor of excitement. I know Bimala finds it difficult to respect me for this, taking my scruples for feebleness and she is quite angry with me because I am not running amuck crying *Bande Mataram*.

For the matter of that, I have become unpopular with all my countrymen because I have not joined them in their carousals. They are certain that either I have a longing for some title, or else that I am afraid of the police. The police on their side suspect me of harbouring some hidden design and protesting too much in my

mildness.

What I really feel is this, that those who cannot find food for their enthusiasm in a knowledge of their country as it actually is, or those who cannot love men just because they are men who needs must shout and deify their country in order to keep up their excitement these love excitement more than their country.

To try to give our infatuation a higher place than Truth is a sign of inherent slavishness. Where our minds are free we find ourselves lost. Our moribund vitality must have for its rider either some fantasy, or someone in authority, or a sanction from the pundits, in order to make it move. So long as we are impervious to truth and have to be moved by some hypnotic stimulus, we must know that we lack the capacity for self−government. Whatever may be our condition, we shall either need some imaginary ghost or some actual medicine−man to terrorize over us.

The other day when Sandip accused me of lack of imagination, saying that this prevented me from realizing my country in a visible image, Bimala agreed with him. I did not say anything in my defence, because to win in argument does not lead to happiness. Her difference of opinion is not due to any inequality of intelligence, but rather to dissimilarity of nature.

They accuse me of being unimaginative that is, according to them, I may have oil in my lamp, but no flame. Now this is exactly the accusation which I bring against them. I would say to them: "You are dark, even as the flints are. You must come to violent conflicts and make a noise in order to produce your sparks. But their disconnected flashes merely assist your pride, and not your clear vision."

I have been noticing for some time that there is a gross cupidity about Sandip. His fleshly feelings make him harbour delusions about his religion and impel him into a tyrannical attitude in his patriotism. His intellect is keen, but his nature is coarse, and so he glorifies his selfish lusts under high−sounding names. The cheap consolations of hatred are as urgently necessary for him as the satisfaction of his appetites. Bimala has often warned me, in the old days, of his hankering after money. I understood this, but I could not bring myself to haggle with Sandip. I felt ashamed even to own to myself that he was trying to take advantage of me.

It will, however, be difficult to explain to Bimala today that Sandip's love of country is but a different phase of his covetous self−love. Bimala's hero−worship of Sandip makes me hesitate all the more to talk to her about him, lest some touch of jealousy may lead me unwittingly into exaggeration. It may be that the pain at my heart is already making me see a distorted picture of Sandip. And yet it is better perhaps to speak out than to keep my feelings gnawing within me.

II

I have known my master these thirty years. Neither calumny, nor disaster, nor death itself has any terrors for him. Nothing could have saved me, born as I was into the traditions of this family of ours, but that he has established his own life in the centre of mine, with its peace and truth and spiritual vision, thus making it possible for me to realize goodness in its truth.

My master came to me that day and said: "Is it necessary to detain Sandip here any longer?"

His nature was so sensitive to all omens of evil that he had at once understood. He was not easily moved, but that day he felt the dark shadow of trouble ahead. Do I not know how well he loves me?

At tea−time I said to Sandip: "I have just had a letter from Rangpur. They are complaining that I am selfishly detaining you. When will you be going there?"

Bimala was pouring out the tea. Her face fell at once. She threw just one enquiring glance at Sandip.

"I have been thinking," said Sandip, "that this wandering up and down means a tremendous waste of energy. I feel that if I could work from a centre I could achieve more permanent results."

With this he looked up at Bimala and asked: "Do you not think so too?"

Bimala hesitated for a reply and then said: "Both ways seem good to do the work from a centre, as well as by travelling about. That in which you find greater satisfaction is the way for you."

"Then let me speak out my mind," said Sandip. "I have never yet found any one source of inspiration suffice me for good. That is why I have been constantly moving about, rousing enthusiasm in the people, from which in turn I draw my own store of energy. Today you have given me the message of my country. Such fire I have never beheld in any man. I shall be able to spread the fire of enthusiasm in my country by borrowing it from you. No, do not be ashamed. You are far above all modesty and diffidence. You are the Queen Bee of our hive, and we the workers shall rally around you. You shall be our centre, our inspiration."

Bimala flushed all over with bashful pride and her hand shook as she went on pouring out the tea.

Another day my master came to me and said: "Why don't you two go up to Darjeeling for a change? You are not looking well. Have you been getting enough sleep?"

I asked Bimala in the evening whether she would care to have a trip to the Hills. I knew she had a great longing to see the Himalayas. But she refused . . . The country's Cause, I suppose!

I must not lose my faith: I shall wait. The passage from the narrow to the larger world is stormy. When she is familiar with this freedom, then I shall know where my place is. If I discover that I do not fit in with the arrangement of the outer world, then I shall not quarrel with my fate, but silently take my leave . . . Use force? But for what? Can force prevail against Truth?

Sandip's Story

I

The impotent man says: "That which has come to my share is mine." And the weak man assents. But the lesson of the whole world is: "That is really mine which I can snatch away." My country does not become mine simply because it is the country of my birth. It becomes mine on the day when I am able to win it by force.

Every man has a natural right to possess, and therefore greed is natural. It is not in the wisdom of nature that we should be content to be deprived. What my mind covets, my surroundings must supply. This is the only true understanding between our inner and outer nature in this world. Let moral ideals remain merely for those poor anaemic creatures of starved desire whose grasp is weak. Those who can desire with all their soul and enjoy with all their heart, those who have no hesitation or scruple, it is they who are the anointed of Providence. Nature spreads out her riches and loveliest treasures for their benefit. They swim across streams, leap over walls, kick open doors, to help themselves to whatever is worth taking. In such a getting one can rejoice; such wresting as this gives value to the thing taken.

Nature surrenders herself, but only to the robber. For she delights in this forceful desire, this forceful abduction. And so she does not put the garland of her acceptance round the lean, scraggy neck of the ascetic.

The music of the wedding march is struck. The time of the wedding I must not let pass. My heart therefore is eager. For, who is the bridegroom? It is I. The bridegroom's place belongs to him who, torch in hand, can come in time. The bridegroom in Nature's wedding hall comes unexpected and uninvited.

Ashamed? No, I am never ashamed! I ask for whatever I want, and I do not always wait to ask before I take it. Those who are deprived by their own diffidence dignify their privation by the name of modesty. The world into which we are born is the world of reality. When a man goes away from the market of real things with empty hands and empty stomach, merely filling his bag with big sounding words, I wonder why he ever came into this hard world at all. Did these men get their appointment from the epicures of the religious world, to play set tunes on sweet, pious texts in that pleasure garden where blossom airy nothings? I neither affect those tunes nor do I find any sustenance in those blossoms.

What I desire, I desire positively, superlatively. I want to knead it with both my hands and both my feet; I want to smear it all over my body; I want to gorge myself with it to the full. The scrannel pipes of those who have worn themselves out by their moral fastings, till they have become flat and pale like starved vermin infesting a long−deserted bed, will never reach my ear.

I would conceal nothing, because that would be cowardly. But if I cannot bring myself to conceal when concealment is needful, that also is cowardly. Because you have your greed, you build your walls. Because I have my greed, I break through them. You use your power: I use my craft. These are the realities of life. On these depend kingdoms and empires and all the great enterprises of men.

As for those *avatars* who come down from their paradise to talk to us in some holy jargon their words are not real. Therefore, in spite of all the applause they get, these sayings of theirs only find a place in the hiding corners of the weak. They are despised by those who are strong, the rulers of the world. Those who have had the courage to see this have won success, while those poor wretches who are dragged one way by nature and the other way by these ava tars, they set one foot in the boat of the real and the other in the boat of the unreal, and thus are in a pitiable plight, able neither to advance nor to keep their place.

There are many men who seem to have been born only with an obsession to die. Possibly there is a beauty, like that of a sunset, in this lingering death in life which seems to fascinate them. Nikhil lives this kind of life, if life it may be called. Years ago, I had a great argument with him on this point.

"It is true," he said, "that you cannot get anything except by force. But then what is this force? And then also, what is this getting? The strength I believe in is the strength of renouncing."

"So you," I exclaimed, "are infatuated with the glory of bankruptcy."

"Just as desperately as the chick is infatuated about the bankruptcy of its shell," he replied. "The shell is real enough, yet it is given up in exchange for intangible light and air. A sorry exchange, I suppose you would call it?"

When once Nikhil gets on to metaphor, there is no hope of making him see that he is merely dealing with words, not with realities. Well, well, let him be happy with his metaphors. We are the flesh−eaters of the world; we have teeth and nails; we pursue and grab and tear. We are not satisfied with chewing in the evening the cud of the grass we have eaten in the morning. Anyhow, we cannot allow your metaphor−mongers to bar the door to our sustenance. In that case we shall simply steal or rob, for we must live.

People will say that I am starting some novel theory just because those who are moving in this world are in the habit of talking differently though they are really acting up to it all the time. Therefore they fail to understand, as I do, that this is the only working moral principle. In point of fact, I know that my idea is not

an empty theory at all, for it has been proved in practical life. I have found that my way always wins over the hearts of women, who are creatures of this world of reality and do not roam about in cloud−land, as men do, in idea−filled balloons.

Women find in my features, my manner, my gait, my speech, a masterful passion not a passion dried thin with the heat of asceticism, not a passion with its face turned back at every step in doubt and debate, but a full−blooded passion. It roars and rolls on, like a flood, with the cry: "I want, I want, I want." Women feel, in their own heart of hearts, that this indomitable passion is the lifeblood of the world, acknowledging no law but itself, and therefore victorious. For this reason they have so often abandoned themselves to be swept away on the flood−tide of my passion, recking naught as to whether it takes them to life or to death. This power which wins these women is the power of mighty men, the power which wins the world of reality.

Those who imagine the greater desirability of another world merely shift their desires from the earth to the skies. It remains to be seen how high their gushing fountain will play, and for how long. But this much is certain: women were not created for these pale creatures these lotus−eaters of idealism.

"Affinity!" When it suited my need, I have often said that God has created special pairs of men and women, and that the union of such is the only legitimate union, higher than all unions made by law. The reason of it is, that though man wants to follow nature, he can find no pleasure in it unless he screens himself with some phrase and that is why this world is so overflowing with lies.

"Affinity!" Why should there be only one? There may be affinity with thousands. It was never in my agreement with nature that I should overlook all my innumerable affinities for the sake of only one. I have discovered many in my own life up to now, yet that has not closed the door to one more and that one is clearly visible to my eyes. She has also discovered her own affinity to me.

And then?

Then, if I do not win I am a coward.

Chapter Three. Bimala's Story

VI

I WONDER what could have happened to my feeling of shame. The fact is, I had no time to think about myself. My days and nights were passing in a whirl, like an eddy with myself in the centre. No gap was left for hesitation or delicacy to enter.

One day my sister−in−law remarked to my husband: "Up to now the women of this house have been kept weeping. Here comes the men's turn.

"We must see that they do not miss it," she continued, turning to me. "I see you are out for the fray, Chota [12] Rani! Hurl your shafts straight at their hearts."

Her keen eyes looked me up and down. Not one of the colours into which my toilet, my dress, my manners, my speech, had blossomed out had escaped her. I am ashamed to speak of it today, but I felt no shame then. Something within me was at work of which I was not even conscious. I used to overdress, it is true, but more like an automaton, with no particular design. No doubt I knew which effort of mine would prove specially pleasing to Sandip Babu, but that required no intuition, for he would discuss it openly before all of them.

One day he said to my husband: "Do you know, Nikhil, when I first saw our Queen Bee, she was sitting there so demurely in her gold−bordered *sari*. Her eyes were gazing inquiringly into space, like stars which had lost their way, just as if she had been for ages standing on the edge of some darkness, looking out for something unknown. But when I saw her, I felt a quiver run through me. It seemed to me that the gold border of her *sari* was her own inner fire flaming out and twining round her. That is the flame we want, visible fire! Look here, Queen Bee, you really must do us the favour of dressing once more as a living flame."

So long I had been like a small river at the border of a village. My rhythm and my language were different from what they are now. But the tide came up from the sea, and my breast heaved; my banks gave way and the great drumbeats of the sea waves echoed in my mad current. I could not understand the meaning of that sound in my blood. Where was that former self of mine? Whence came foaming into me this surging flood of glory? Sandip's hungry eyes burnt like the lamps of worship before my shrine. All his gaze proclaimed that I was a wonder in beauty and power; and the loudness of his praise, spoken and unspoken, drowned all other voices in my world. Had the Creator created me afresh, I wondered? Did he wish to make up now for neglecting me so long? I who before was plain had become suddenly beautiful. I who before had been of no account now felt in myself all the splendour of Bengal itself.

For Sandip Babu was not a mere individual. In him was the confluence of millions of minds of the country. When he called me the Queen Bee of the hive, I was acclaimed with a chorus of praise by all our patriot workers. After that, the loud jests of my sister−in−law could not touch me any longer. My relations with all the world underwent a change. Sandip Babu made it clear how all the country was in need of me. I had no difficulty in believing this at the time, for I felt that I had the power to do everything. Divine strength had come to me. It was something which I had never felt before, which was beyond myself. I had no time to question it to find out what was its nature. It seemed to belong to me, and yet to transcend me. It comprehended the whole of Bengal.

Sandip Babu would consult me about every little thing touching the Cause. At first I felt very awkward and would hang back, but that soon wore off. Whatever I suggested seemed to astonish him. He would go into raptures and say: "Men can only think. You women have a way of understanding without thinking. Woman was created out of God's own fancy. Man, He had to hammer into shape."

Letters used to come to Sandip Babu from all parts of the country which were submitted to me for my opinion. Occasionally he disagreed with me. But I would not argue with him. Then after a day or two as if a new light had suddenly dawned upon him he would send for me and say: "It was my mistake. Your suggestion was the correct one." He would often confess to me that wherever he had taken steps contrary to my advice he had gone wrong. Thus I gradually came to be convinced that behind whatever was taking place was Sandip Babu, and behind Sandip Babu was the plain common sense of a woman. The glory of a great responsibility filled my being.

My husband had no place in our counsels. Sandip Babu treated him as a younger brother, of whom personally one may be very fond and yet have no use for his business advice. He would tenderly and smilingly talk about my husband's childlike innocence, saying that his curious doctrine and perversities of mind had a flavour of humour which made them all the more lovable. It was seemingly this very affection for Nikhil which led Sandip Babu to forbear from troubling him with the burden of the country.

Nature has many anodynes in her pharmacy, which she secretly administers when vital relations are being insidiously severed, so that none may know of the operation, till at last one awakes to know what a great rent has been made. When the knife was busy with my life's most intimate tie, my mind was so clouded with fumes of intoxicating gas that I was not in the least aware of what a cruel thing was happening. Possibly this is woman's nature. When her passion is roused she loses her sensibility for all that is outside it. When, like the river, we women keep to our banks, we give nourishment with all that we have: when we overflow them

we destroy with all that we are.

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12. Bimala. the younger brother's wife, was the *Chota* or Junior Rani.

Sandip's Story

II

I can see that something has gone wrong. I got an inkling of it the other day.

Ever since my arrival, Nikhil's sitting−room had become a thing amphibious half women's apartment, half men's: Bimala had access to it from the zenana, it was not barred to me from the outer side. If we had only gone slow, and made use of our privileges with some restraint, we might not have fallen foul of other people. But we went ahead so vehemently that we could not think of the consequences.

Whenever Bee comes into Nikhil's room, I somehow get to know of it from mine. There are the tinkle of bangles and other little sounds; the door is perhaps shut with a shade of unnecessary vehemence; the bookcase is a trifle stiff and creaks if jerked open. When I enter I find Bee, with her back to the door, ever so busy selecting a book from the shelves. And as I offer to assist her in this difficult task she starts and protests; and then we naturally get on to other topics.

The other day, on an inauspicious [13] Thursday afternoon, I sallied forth from my room at the call of these same sounds. There was a man on guard in the passage. I walked on without so much as glancing at him, but as I approached the door he put himself in my way saying: "Not that way, sir."

"Not that way! Why?"

"The Rani Mother is there."

"Oh, very well. Tell your Rani Mother that Sandip Babu wants to see her."

"That cannot be, sir. It is against orders."

I felt highly indignant. "I order you!" I said in a raised voice.

"Go and announce me."

The fellow was somewhat taken aback at my attitude. In the meantime I had neared the door. I was on the point of reaching it, when he followed after me and took me by the arm saying: "No, sir, you must not."

What! To be touched by a flunkey! I snatched away my arm and gave the man a sounding blow. At this moment Bee came out of the room to find the man about to insult me.

I shall never forget the picture of her wrath! That Bee is beautiful is a discovery of my own. Most of our people would see nothing in her. Her tall, slim figure these boors would call "lanky". But it is just this lithesomeness of hers that I admire like an up−leaping fountain of life, coming direct out of the depths of the Creator's heart. Her complexion is dark, but it is the lustrous darkness of a sword−blade, keen and scintillating.

"Nanku!" she commanded, as she stood in the doorway, pointing with her finger, "leave us."

"Do not be angry with him," said I. "If it is against orders, it is I who should retire."

Bee's voice was still trembling as she replied: "You must not go. Come in."

It was not a request, but again a command! I followed her in, and taking a chair fanned myself with a fan which was on the table. Bee scribbled something with a pencil on a sheet of paper and, summoning a servant, handed it to him saying: "Take this to the Maharaja."

"Forgive me," I resumed. "I was unable to control myself, and hit that man of yours.

"You served him right," said Bee.

"But it was not the poor fellow's fault, after all. He was only obeying his orders."

Here Nikhil came in, and as he did so I left my seat with a rapid movement and went and stood near the window with my back to the room.

"Nanku, the guard, has insulted Sandip Babu," said Bee to Nikhil.

Nikhil seemed to be so genuinely surprised that I had to turn round and stare at him. Even an outrageously good man fails in keeping up his pride of truthfulness before his wife if she be the proper kind of woman.

"He insolently stood in the way when Sandip Babu was coming in here," continued Bee. "He said he had orders . . ."

"Whose orders?" asked Nikhil.

"How am I to know?" exclaimed Bee impatiently, her eyes brimming over with mortification.

Nikhil sent for the man and questioned him. "It was not my fault," Nanku repeated sullenly. "I had my orders."

"Who gave you the order?"

"The Bara Rani Mother."

We were all silent for a while. After the man had left, Bee said: "Nanku must go!"

Nikhil remained silent. I could see that his sense of justice would not allow this. There was no end to his qualms. But this time he was up against a tough problem. Bee was not the woman to take things lying down. She would have to get even with her sister−in−law by punishing this fellow. And as Nikhil remained silent, her eyes flashed fire. She knew not how to pour her scorn upon her husband's feebleness of spirit. Nikhil left the room after a while without another word.

The next day Nanku was not to be seen. On inquiry, I learnt that he had been sent off to some other part of the estates, and that his wages had not suffered by such transfer.

I could catch glimpses of the ravages of the storm raging over this, behind the scenes. All I can say is, that Nikhil is a curious creature, quite out of the common.

The upshot was, that after this Bee began to send for me to the sitting−room, for a chat, without any contrivance, or pretence of its being an accident. Thus from bare suggestion we came to broad hint: the implied came to be expressed. The daughter−in−law of a princely house lives in a starry region so remote from the ordinary outsider that there is not even a regular road for his approach. What a triumphal progress of Truth was this which, gradually but persistently, thrust aside veil after veil of obscuring custom, till at length Nature herself was laid bare.

Truth? Of course it was the truth! The attraction of man and woman for each other is fundamental. The whole world of matter, from the speck of dust upwards, is ranged on its side. And yet men would keep it hidden away out of sight, behind a tissue of words; and with home−made sanctions and prohibitions make of it a domestic utensil. Why, it's as absurd as melting down the solar system to make a watch−chain for one's son−in−law! [14]

When, in spite of all, reality awakes at the call of what is but naked truth, what a gnashing of teeth and beating of breasts is there! But can one carry on a quarrel with a storm? It never takes the trouble to reply, it only gives a shaking.

I am enjoying the sight of this truth, as it gradually reveals itself. These tremblings of steps, these turnings of the face, are sweet to me: and sweet are the deceptions which deceive not only others, but also Bee herself. When Reality has to meet the unreal, deception is its principal weapon; for its enemies always try to shame Reality by calling it gross, and so it needs must hide itself, or else put on some disguise. The circumstances are such that it dare not frankly avow: "Yes, I am gross, because I am true. I am flesh. I am passion. I am hunger, unashamed and cruel."

All is now clear to me. The curtain flaps, and through it I can see the preparations for the catastrophe. The little red ribbon, which peeps through the luxuriant masses of her hair, with its flush of secret longing, it is the lolling tongue of the red storm cloud. I feel the warmth of each turn of her *sari*, each suggestion of her raiment, of which even the wearer may not be fully conscious.

Bee was not conscious, because she was ashamed of the reality; to which men have given a bad name, calling it Satan; and so it has to steal into the garden of paradise in the guise of a snake, and whisper secrets into the ears of man's chosen consort and make her rebellious; then farewell to all ease; and after that comes death!

My poor little Queen Bee is living in a dream. She knows not which way she is treading. It would not be safe to awaken her before the time. It is best for me to pretend to be equally unconscious.

The other day, at dinner, she was gazing at me in a curious sort of way, little realizing what such glances mean! As my eyes met hers, she turned away with a flush. "You are surprised at my appetite," I remarked. "I can hide everything, except that I am greedy! Anyhow, why trouble to blush for me, since I am shameless?"

This only made her colour more furiously, as she stammered: "No, no, I was only. . ."

"I know," I interrupted. "Women have a weakness for greedy men; for it is this greed of ours which gives them the upper hand. The indulgence which I have always received at their hands has made me all the more shameless. I do not mind your watching the good things disappear, not one bit. I mean to enjoy every one of them."

The other day I was reading an English book in which sex−problems were treated in an audaciously realistic manner. I had left it lying in the sitting−room. As I went there the next afternoon, for something or other, I found Bee seated with this book in her hand. When she heard my footsteps she hurriedly put it down and placed another book over it a volume of Mrs Hemans's poems.

"I have never been able to make out," I began, "why women are so shy about being caught reading poetry. We men lawyers, mechanics, or what not may well feel ashamed. If we must read poetry, it should be at dead of night, within closed doors. But you women are so akin to poesy. The Creator Himself is a lyric poet, and Jayadeva [15] must have practised the divine art seated at His feet."

Bee made no reply, but only blushed uncomfortably. She made as if she would leave the room. Whereupon I protested: "No, no, pray read on. I will just take a book I left here, and run away." With which I took up my book from the table. "Lucky you did not think of glancing over its pages," I continued, "or you would have wanted to chastise me."

"Indeed! Why?" asked Bee.

"Because it is not poetry," said I. "Only blunt things, bluntly put, without any finicking niceness. I wish Nikhil would read it."

Bee frowned a little as she murmured: "What makes you wish that?"

"He is a man, you see, one of us. My only quarrel with him is that he delights in a misty vision of this world. Have you not observed how this trait of his makes him look on *Swadeshi* as if it was some poem of which the metre must be kept correct at every step? We, with the clubs of our prose, are the iconoclasts of metre."

"What has your book to do with *Swadeshi*?"

"You would know if you only read it. Nikhil wants to go by made−up maxims, in *Swadeshi* as in everything else; so he knocks up against human nature at every turn, and then falls to abusing it. He never will realize that human nature was created long before phrases were, and will survive them too."

Bee was silent for a while and then gravely said: "Is it not a part of human nature to try and rise superior to itself?"

I smiled inwardly. "These are not your words", I thought to myself. "You have learnt them from Nikhil. You are a healthy human being. Your flesh and blood have responded to the call of reality. You are burning in every vein with life−fire do I not know it? How long should they keep you cool with the wet towel of moral precepts?"

"The weak are in the majority," I said aloud. "They are continually poisoning the ears of men by repeating these shibboleths. Nature has denied them strength it is thus that they try to enfeeble others."

"We women are weak," replied Bimala. "So I suppose we must join in the conspiracy of the weak."

"Women weak!" I exclaimed with a laugh. "Men belaud you as delicate and fragile, so as to delude you into thinking yourselves weak. But it is you women who are strong. Men make a great outward show of their so−called freedom, but those who know their inner minds are aware of their bondage. They have manufactured scriptures with their own hands to bind themselves; with their very idealism they have made golden fetters of women to wind round their body and mind. If men had not that extraordinary faculty of entangling themselves in meshes of their own contriving, nothing could have kept them bound. But as for you women, you have desired to conceive reality with body and soul. You have given birth to reality. You have suckled reality at your breasts."

Bee was well read for a woman, and would not easily give in to my arguments. "If that were true," she objected, "men would not have found women attractive."

"Women realize the danger," I replied. "They know that men love delusions, so they give them full measure by borrowing their own phrases. They know that man, the drunkard, values intoxication more than food, and so they try to pass themselves off as an intoxicant. As a matter of fact, but for the sake of man, woman has no need for any make−believe."

"Why, then, are you troubling to destroy the illusion?"

"For freedom. I want the country to be free. I want human relations to be free."

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13. According to the Hindu calendar [Trans.].

14. The son−in−law is the pet of a Hindu household.

15. A Vaishnava poet (Sanskrit) whose lyrics of the adoration of the Divinity serve as well to express all shades of human passion [Trans.].

III

I was aware that it is unsafe suddenly to awake a sleep−walker. But I am so impetuous by nature, a halting gait does not suit me. I knew I was overbold that day. I knew that the first shock of such ideas is apt to be almost intolerable. But with women it is always audacity that wins.

Just as we were getting on nicely, who should walk in but Nikhil's old tutor Chandranath Babu. The world would have been not half a bad place to live in but for these schoolmasters, who make one want to quit in disgust. The Nikhil type wants to keep the world always a school. This incarnation of a school turned up that afternoon at the psychological moment.

We all remain schoolboys in some corner of our hearts, and I, even I, felt somewhat pulled up. As for poor Bee, she at once took her place solemnly, like the topmost girl of the class on the front bench. All of a sudden she seemed to remember that she had to face her examination.

Some people are so like eternal pointsmen lying in wait by the line, to shunt one's train of thought from one rail to another.

Chandranath Babu had no sooner come in than he cast about for some excuse to retire, mumbling: "I beg your pardon, I. . ."

Before he could finish, Bee went up to him and made a profound obeisance, saying: "Pray do not leave us, sir. Will you not take a seat?" She looked like a drowning person clutching at him for support the little coward!

But possibly I was mistaken. It is quite likely that there was a touch of womanly wile in it. She wanted, perhaps, to raise her value in my eyes. She might have been pointedly saying to me: "Please don't imagine for a moment that I am entirely overcome by you. My respect for Chandranath Babu is even greater."

Well, indulge in your respect by all means! Schoolmasters thrive on it. But not being one of them, I have no use for that empty compliment.

Chandranath Babu began to talk about *Swadeshi*. I thought I would let him go on with his monologues. There

is nothing like letting an old man talk himself out. It makes him feel that he is winding up the world, forgetting all the while how far away the real world is from his wagging tongue.

But even my worst enemy would not accuse me of patience. And when Chandranath Babu went on to say: "If we expect to gather fruit where we have sown no seed, then we . . ." I had to interrupt him.

"Who wants fruit?" I cried. "We go by the Author of the Gita who says that we are concerned only with the doing, not with the fruit of our deeds."

"What is it then that you do want?" asked Chandranath Babu.

"Thorns!" I exclaimed, "which cost nothing to plant."

"Thorns do not obstruct others only," he replied. "They have a way of hurting one's own feet."

"That is all right for a copy−book," I retorted. "But the real thing is that we have this burning at heart. Now we have only to cultivate thorns for others" soles; afterwards when they hurt us we shall find leisure to repent. But why be frightened even of that? When at last we have to die it will be time enough to get cold. While we are on fire let us seethe and boil."

Chandranath Babu smiled. "Seethe by all means," he said, "but do not mistake it for work, or heroism. Nations which have got on in the world have done so by action, not by ebullition. Those who have always lain in dread of work, when with a start they awake to their sorry plight, they look to short−cuts and scamping for their deliverance."

I was girding up my loins to deliver a crushing reply, when Nikhil came back. Chandranath Babu rose, and looking towards Bee, said: "Let me go now, my little mother, I have some work to attend to."

As he left, I showed Nikhil the book in my hand. "I was telling Queen Bee about this book," I said.

Ninety−nine per cent of people have to be deluded with lies, but it. is easier to delude this perpetual pupil of the schoolmaster with the truth. He is best cheated openly. So, in playing with him, the simplest course was to lay my cards on the table.

Nikhil read the title on the cover, but said nothing. "These writers," I continued, "are busy with their brooms, sweeping away the dust of epithets with which men have covered up this world of ours. So, as I was saying, I wish you would read it."

"I have read it," said Nikhil.

"Well, what do you say?"

"It is all very well for those who really care to think, but poison for those who shirk thought."

"What do you mean?"

"Those who preach 'Equal Rights of Property' should not be thieves. For, if they are, they would be preaching lies. When passion is in the ascendant, this kind of book is not rightly understood."

"Passion," I replied, "is the street lamp which guides us. To call it untrue is as hopeless as to expect to see better by plucking out our natural eyes."

Nikhil was visibly growing excited. "I accept the truth of passion," he said, "only when I recognize the truth of restraint. By pressing what we want to see right into our eyes we only injure them: we do not see. So does the violence of passion, which would leave no space between the mind and its object, defeat its purpose."

"It is simply your intellectual foppery," I replied, "which makes you indulge in moral delicacy, ignoring the savage side of truth. This merely helps you to mystify things, and so you fail to do your work with any degree of strength."

"The intrusion of strength," said Nikhil impatiently, "where strength is out of place, does not help you in your work . . . But why are we arguing about these things? Vain arguments only brush off the fresh bloom of truth."

I wanted Bee to join in the discussion, but she had not said a word up to now. Could I have given her too rude a shock, leaving her assailed with doubts and wanting to learn her lesson afresh from the schoolmaster? Still, a thorough shaking−up is essential. One must begin by realizing that things supposed to be unshakeable can be shaken.

"I am glad I had this talk with you," I said to Nikhil, "for I was on the point of lending this book to Queen Bee to read."

"What harm?" said Nikhil. "If I could read the book, why not Bimala too? All I want to say is, that in Europe people look at everything from the viewpoint of science. But man is neither mere physiology, nor biology, nor psychology, nor even sociology. For God's sake don't forget that. Man is infinitely more than the natural science of himself. You laugh at me, calling me the schoolmaster's pupil, but that is what you are, not I. You want to find the truth of man from your science teachers, and not from your own inner being."

"But why all this excitement?" I mocked.

"Because I see you are bent on insulting man and making him petty."

"Where on earth do you see all that?"

"In the air, in my outraged feelings. You would go on wounding the great, the unselfish, the beautiful in man."

"What mad idea is this of yours?"

Nikhil suddenly stood up. "I tell you plainly, Sandip," he said, "man may be wounded unto death, but he will not die. This is the reason why I am ready to suffer all, knowing all, with eyes open."

With these words he hurriedly left the room.

I was staring blankly at his retreating figure, when the sound of a book, falling from the table, made me turn to find Bee following him with quick, nervous steps, making a detour to avoid passing too near me.

A curious creature, that Nikhil! He feels the danger threatening his home, and yet why does he not turn me out? I know, he is waiting for Bimal to give him the cue. If Bimal tells him that their mating has been a misfit, he will bow his head and admit that it may have been a blunder! He has not the strength of mind to understand that to acknowledge a mistake is the greatest of all mistakes. He is a typical example of how ideas make for weakness. I have not seen another like him so whimsical a product of nature! He would hardly do as a character in a novel or drama, to say nothing of real life.

And Bee? I am afraid her dream−life is over from today. She has at length understood the nature of the current which is bearing her along. Now she must either advance or retreat, open−eyed. The chances are she will now advance a step, and then retreat a step. But that does not disturb me. When one is on fire, this rushing to and fro makes the blaze all the fiercer. The fright she has got will only fan her passion.

Perhaps I had better not say much to her, but simply select some modern books for her to read. Let her gradually come to the conviction that to acknowledge and respect passion as the supreme reality, is to be modern not to be ashamed of it, not to glorify restraint. If she finds shelter in some such word as "modern", she will find strength.

Be that as it may, I must see this out to the end of the Fifth Act. I cannot, unfortunately, boast of being merely a spectator, seated in the royal box, applauding now and again. There is a wrench at my heart, a pang in every nerve. When I have put out the light and am in my bed, little touches, little glances, little words flit about and fill the darkness. When I get up in the morning, I thrill with lively anticipations, my blood seems to course through me to the strains of music . . .

There was a double photo−frame on the table with Bee's photograph by the side of Nikhil's. I had taken out hers. Yesterday I showed Bee the empty side and said: "Theft becomes necessary only because of miserliness, so its sin must be divided between the miser and the thief. Do you not think so?"

"It was not a good one," observed Bee simply, with a little smile.

"What is to be done?" said I. "A portrait cannot be better than a portrait. I must be content with it, such as it is."

Bee took up a book and began to turn over the pages. "If you are annoyed," I went on, "I must make a shift to fill up the vacancy."

Today I have filled it up. This photograph of mine was taken in my early youth. My face was then fresher, and so was my mind. Then I still cherished some illusions about this world and the next. Faith deceives men, but it has one great merit: it imparts a radiance to the features.

My portrait now reposes next to Nikhil's, for are not the two of us old friends?

Chapter Four

Nikhil's Story

III

I WAS never self−conscious. But nowadays I often try to take an outside view to see myself as Bimal sees me. What a dismally solemn picture it makes, my habit of taking things too seriously!

Better, surely, to laugh away the world than flood it with tears. That is, in fact, how the world gets on. We relish our food and rest, only because we can dismiss, as so many empty shadows, the sorrows scattered everywhere, both in the home and in the outer world. If we took them as true, even for a moment, where would be our appetite, our sleep?

But I cannot dismiss myself as one of these shadows, and so the load of my sorrow lies eternally heavy on the heart of my world.

Why not stand out aloof in the highway of the universe, and feel yourself to be part of the all? In the midst of the immense, age−long concourse of humanity, what is Bimal to you? Your wife? What is a wife? A bubble of a name blown big with your own breath, so carefully guarded night and day, yet ready to burst at any pin−prick from outside.

My wife and so, forsooth, my very own! If she says: "No, I am myself" am I to reply: "How can that be? Are you not mine?"

"My wife" Does that amount to an argument, much less the truth? Can one imprison a whole personality within that name?

My wife! Have I not cherished in this little world all that is purest and sweetest in my life, never for a moment letting it down from my bosom to the dust? What incense of worship, what music of passion, what flowers of my spring and of my autumn, have I not offered up at its shrine? If, like a toy paper−boat, she be swept along into the muddy waters of the gutter would I not also. . . ?

There it is again, my incorrigible solemnity! Why "muddy"? What "gutter,? Names, called in a fit of jealousy, do not change the facts of the world. If Bimal is not mine, she is not; and no fuming, or fretting, or arguing will serve to prove that she is. If my heart is breaking let it break! That will not make the world bankrupt nor even me; for man is so much greater than the things he loses in this life. The very ocean of tears has its other shore, else none would have ever wept.

But then there is Society to be considered . . . which let Society consider! If I weep it is for myself, not for Society. If Bimal should say she is not mine, what care I where my Society wife may be?

Suffering there must be; but I must save myself, by any means in my power, from one form of self−torture: I must never think that my life loses its value because of any neglect it may suffer. The full value of my life does not all go to buy my narrow domestic world; its great commerce does not stand or fall with some petty success or failure in the bartering of my personal joys and sorrows.

The time has come when I must divest Bimala of all the ideal decorations with which I decked her. It was owing to my own weakness that I indulged in such idolatry. I was too greedy. I created an angel of Bimala, in order to exaggerate my own enjoyment. But Bimala is what she is. It is preposterous to expect that she should assume the rôle of an angel for my pleasure. The Creator is under no obligation to supply me with angels, just because I have an avidity for imaginary perfection.

I must acknowledge that I have merely been an accident in Bimala's life. Her nature, perhaps, can only find true union with one like Sandip. At the same time, I must not, in false modesty, accept my rejection as my desert. Sandip certainly has attractive qualities, which had their sway also upon myself; but yet, I feel sure, he is not a greater man than I. If the wreath of victory falls to his lot today, and I am overlooked, then the dispenser of the wreath will be called to judgement.

I say this in no spirit of boasting. Sheer necessity has driven me to the pass, that to secure myself from utter desolation I must recognize all the value that I truly possess. Therefore, through the, terrible experience of suffering let there come upon me the joy of deliverance deliverance from self−distrust.

I have come to distinguish what is really in me from what I foolishly imagined to be there. The profit and loss account has been settled, and that which remains is myself not a crippled self, dressed in rags and tatters, not a sick self to be nursed on invalid diet, but a spirit which has gone through the worst, and has survived.

My master passed through my room a moment ago and said with his hand on my shoulder. "Get away to bed,

Nikhil, the night is far advanced."

The fact is, it has become so difficult for me to go to bed till late till Bimal is fast asleep. In the day−time we meet, and even converse, but what am I to say when we are alone together, in the silence of the night? so ashamed do I feel in mind and body.

"How is it, sir, you have not yet retired?" I asked in my turn. My master smiled a little, as he left me, saying: "My sleeping days are over. I have now attained the waking age.

I had written thus far, and was about to rise to go off bedwards when, through the window before me, I saw the heavy pall of July cloud suddenly part a little, and a big star shine through. It seemed to say to me: "Dreamland ties are made, and dreamland ties are broken, but I am here for ever the everlasting lamp of the bridal night."

All at once my heart was full with the thought that my Eternal Love was steadfastly waiting for me through the ages, behind the veil of material things. Through many a life, in many a mirror, have I seen her image broken mirrors, crooked mirrors, dusty mirrors. Whenever I have sought to make the mirror my very own, and shut it up within my box, I have lost sight of the image. But what of that. What have I to do with the mirror, or even the image?

My beloved, your smile shall never fade, and every dawn there shall appear fresh for me the vermilion mark on your forehead!

"What childish cajolery of self−deception," mocks some devil from his dark corner "silly prattle to make children quiet!"

That may be. But millions and millions of children, with their million cries, have to be kept quiet. Can it be that all this multitude is quieted with only a lie? No, my Eternal Love cannot deceive me, for she is true!

She is true; that is why I have seen her and shall see her so often, even in my mistakes, even through the thickest mist of tears. I have seen her and lost her in the crowd of life's market−place, and found her again; and I shall find her once more when I have escaped through the loophole of death.

Ah, cruel one, play with me no longer! If I have failed to track you by the marks of your footsteps on the way, by the scent of your tresses lingering in the air, make me not weep for that for ever. The unveiled star tells me not to fear. That which is eternal must always be there.

Now let me go and see my Bimala. She must have spread her tired limbs on the bed, limp after her struggles, and be asleep. I will leave a kiss on her forehead without waking her that shall be the flower−offering of my worship. I believe I could forget everything after death all my mistakes, all my sufferings but some vibration of the memory of that kiss would remain; for the wreath which is being woven out of the kisses of many a successive birth is to crown the Eternal Beloved.

As the gong of the watch rang out, sounding the hour of two, my sister−in−law came into the room. "Whatever are you doing, brother dear?" [16] she cried. "For pity's sake go to bed and stop worrying so. I cannot bear to look on that awful shadow of pain on your face." Tears welled up in her eyes and overflowed as she entreated me thus.

I could not utter a word, but took the dust of her feet, as I went off to bed.

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16. When a relationship is established by marriage, or by mutual understanding arising out of special friendship or affection, the persons so related call each other in terms of such relationship, and not by name. [Trans.].

Bimala's Story

VII

At first I suspected nothing, feared nothing; I simply felt dedicated to my country. What a stupendous joy there was in this unquestioning surrender. Verily had I realized how, in thoroughness of self−destruction, man can find supreme bliss.

For aught I know, this frenzy of mine might have come to a gradual, natural end. But Sandip Babu would not have it so, he would insist on revealing himself. The tone of his voice became as intimate as a touch, every look flung itself on its knees in beggary. And, through it all, there burned a passion which in its violence made as though it would tear me up by the roots, and drag me along by the hair.

I will not shirk the truth. This cataclysmal desire drew me by day and by night. It seemed desperately alluring this making havoc of myself. What a shame it seemed, how terrible, and yet how sweet! Then there was my overpowering curiosity, to which there seemed no limit. He of whom I knew but little, who never could assuredly be mine, whose youth flared so vigorously in a hundred points of flame oh, the mystery of his seething passions, so immense, so tumultuous!

I began with a feeling of worship, but that soon passed away. I ceased even to respect Sandip; on the contrary, I began to look down upon him. Nevertheless this flesh−and−blood lute of mine, fashioned with my feeling and fancy, found in him a master−player. What though I shrank from his touch, and even came to loathe the lute itself; its music was conjured up all the same.

I must confess there was something in me which . . . what shall I say? . . . which makes me wish I could have died!

Chandranath Babu, when he finds leisure, comes to me. He has the power to lift my mind up to an eminence from where I can see in a moment the boundary of my life extended on all sides and so realize that the lines, which I took from my bounds, were merely imaginary.

But what is the use of it all? Do I really desire emancipation? Let suffering come to our house; let the best in me shrivel up and become black; but let this infatuation not leave me such seems to be my prayer.

When, before my marriage, I used to see a brother−in−law of mine, now dead, mad with drink beating his wife in his frenzy, and then sobbing and howling in maudlin repentance, vowing never to touch liquor again, and yet, the very same evening, sitting down to drink and drink it would fill me with disgust. But my intoxication today is still more fearful. The stuff has not to be procured or poured out: it springs within my veins, and I know not how to resist it.

Must this continue to the end of my days? Now and again I start and look upon myself, and think my life to be a nightmare which will vanish all of a sudden with all its untruth. It has become so frightfully incongruous. It has no connection with its past. What it is, how it could have come to this pass, I cannot understand.

One day my sister−in−law remarked with a cutting laugh: "What a wonderfully hospitable Chota Rani we

have! Her guest absolutely will not budge. In our time there used to be guests, too; but they had not such lavish looking after we were so absurdly taken up with our husbands. Poor brother Nikhil is paying the penalty of being born too modern. He should have come as a guest if he wanted to stay on. Now it looks as if it were time for him to quit . . . O you little demon, do your glances never fall, by chance, on his agonized face?"

This sarcasm did not touch me; for I knew that these women had it not in them to understand the nature of the cause of my devotion. I was then wrapped in the protecting armour of the exaltation of sacrifice, through which such shafts were powerless to reach and shame me.

VIII

For some time all talk of the country's cause has been dropped. Our conversation nowadays has become full of modern sex−problems, and various other matters, with a sprinkling of poetry, both old Vaishnava and modern English, accompanied by a running undertone of melody, low down in the bass, such as I have never in my life heard before, which seems to me to sound the true manly note, the note of power.

The day had come when all cover was gone. There was no longer even the pretence of a reason why Sandip Babu should linger on, or why I should have confidential talks with him every now and then. I felt thoroughly vexed with myself, with my sister−in−law, with the ways of the world, and I vowed I would never again go to the outer apartments, not if I were to die for it.

For two whole days I did not stir out. Then, for the first time, I discovered how far I had travelled. My life felt utterly tasteless. Whatever I touched I wanted to thrust away. I felt myself waiting from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes waiting for something, somebody; my blood kept tingling with some expectation.

I tried busying myself with extra work. The bedroom floor was clean enough but I insisted on its being scrubbed over again under my eyes. Things were arranged in the cabinets in one kind of order; I pulled them all out and rearranged them in a different way. I found no time that afternoon even to do up my hair; I hurriedly tied it into a loose knot, and went and worried everybody, fussing about the store−room. The stores seemed short, and pilfering must have been going on of late, but I could not muster up the courage to take any particular person to task for might not the thought have crossed somebody's mind: "Where were your eyes all these days!"

In short, I behaved that day as one possessed. The next day I tried to do some reading. What I read I have no idea, but after a spell of absentmindedness I found I had wandered away, book in hand, along the passage leading towards the outer apartments, and was standing by a window looking out upon the verandah running along the row of rooms on the opposite side of the quadrangle. One of these rooms, I felt, had crossed over to another shore, and the ferry had ceased to ply. I felt like the ghost of myself of two days ago, doomed to remain where I was, and yet not really there, blankly looking out for ever.

As I stood there, I saw Sandip come out of his room into the verandah, a newspaper in his hand. I could see that he looked extraordinarily disturbed. The courtyard, the railings, in front, seemed to rouse his wrath. He flung away his newspaper with a gesture which seemed to want to rend the space before him.

I felt I could no longer keep my vow. I was about to move on towards the sitting−room, when I found my sister−in−law behind me. "O Lord, this beats everything!" she ejaculated, as she glided away. I could not proceed to the outer apartments.

The next morning when my maid came calling, "Rani Mother, it is getting late for giving out the stores," I flung the keys to her, saying, "Tell Harimati to see to it," and went on with some embroidery of English

pattern on which I was engaged, seated near the window.

Then came a servant with a letter. "From Sandip Babu," said he. What unbounded boldness! What must the messenger have thought? There was a tremor within my breast as I opened the envelope. There was no address on the letter, only the words: *An urgent matter touching the Cause. Sandip*.

I flung aside the embroidery. I was up on my feet in a moment, giving a touch or two to my hair by the mirror. I kept the *sari* I had on, changing only my jacket for one of my jackets had its associations.

I had to pass through one of the verandahs, where my sister−in−law used to sit in the morning slicing betel−nut. I refused to feel awkward. "Whither away, Chota Rani?" she cried.

"To the sitting−room outside."

"So early! A matinée, eh?"

And, as I passed on without further reply, she hummed after me a flippant song.

IX

When I was about to enter the sitting−room, I saw Sandip immersed in an illustrated catalogue of British Academy pictures, with his back to the door. He has a great notion of himself as an expert in matters of Art.

One day my husband said to him: "If the artists ever want a teacher, they need never lack for one so long as you are there." It had not been my husband's habit to speak cuttingly, but latterly there has been a change and he never spares Sandip.

"What makes you suppose that artists need no teachers?" Sandip retorted.

"Art is a creation," my husband replied. "So we should humbly be content to receive our lessons about Art from the work of the artist."

Sandip laughed at this modesty, saying: "You think that meekness is a kind of capital which increases your wealth the more you use it. It is my conviction that those who lack pride only float about like water reeds which have no roots in the soil."

My mind used to be full of contradictions when they talked thus. On the one hand I was eager that my husband should win in argument and that Sandip's pride should be shamed. Yet, on the other, it was Sandip's unabashed pride which attracted me so. It shone like a precious diamond, which knows no diffidence, and sparkles in the face of the sun itself.

I entered the room. I knew Sandip could hear my footsteps as I went forward, but he pretended not to, and kept his eyes on the book.

I dreaded his Art talks, for I could not overcome my delicacy about the pictures he talked of, and the things he said, and had much ado in putting on an air of overdone insensibility to hide my qualms. So, I was almost on the point of retracing my steps, when, with a deep sigh, Sandip raised his eyes, and affected to be startled at the sight of me. "Ah, you have come!" he said.

In his words, in his tone, in his eyes, there was a world of suppressed reproach, as if the claims he had acquired over me made my absence, even for these two or three days, a grievous wrong. I knew this attitude

was an insult to me, but, alas, I had not the power to resent it.

I made no reply, but though I was looking another way, I could not help feeling that Sandip's plaintive gaze had planted itself right on my face, and would take no denial. I did so wish he would say something, so that I could shelter myself behind his words. I cannot tell how long this went on, but at last I could stand it no longer. "What is this matter," I asked, "you are wanting to tell me about?"

Sandip again affected surprise as he said: "Must there always be some matter? Is friendship by itself a crime? Oh, Queen Bee, to think that you should make so light of the greatest thing on earth! Is the heart's worship to be shut out like a stray cur?"

There was again that tremor within me. I could feel the crisis coming, too importunate to be put off. Joy and fear struggled for the mastery. Would my shoulders, I wondered, be broad enough to stand its shock, or would it not leave me overthrown, with my face in the dust?

I was trembling all over. Steadying myself with an effort I repeated: "You summoned me for something touching the Cause, so I have left my household duties to attend to it."

"That is just what I was trying to explain," he said, with a dry laugh. "Do you not know that I come to worship? Have I not told you that, in you, I visualize the *Shakti* of our country? The Geography of a country is not the whole truth. No one can give up his life for a map! When I see you before me, then only do I realize how lovely my country is. When you have anointed me with your own hands, then shall I know I have the sanction of my country; and if, with that in my heart, I fall fighting, it shall not be on the dust of some map−made land, but on a lovingly spread skirt do you know what kind of skirt? like that of the earthen−red *sari* you wore the other day, with a broad blood−red border. Can I ever forget it? Such are the visions which give vigour to life, and joy to death!"

Sandip's eyes took fire as he went on, but whether it was the fire of worship, or of passion, I could not tell. I was reminded of the day on which I first heard him speak, when I could not be sure whether he was a person, or just a living flame.

I had not the power to utter a word. You cannot take shelter behind the walls of decorum when in a moment the fire leaps up and, with the flash of its sword and the roar of its laughter, destroys all the miser's stores. I was in terror lest he should forget himself and take me by the hand. For he shook like a quivering tongue of fire; his eyes showered scorching sparks on me.

"Are you for ever determined," he cried after a pause, "to make gods of your petty household duties you who have it in you to send us to life or to death? Is this power of yours to be kept veiled in a zenana? Cast away all false shame, I pray you; snap your fingers at the whispering around. Take your plunge today into the freedom of the outer world."

When, in Sandip's appeals, his worship of the country gets to be subtly interwoven with his worship of me, then does my blood dance, indeed, and the barriers of my hesitation totter. His talks about Art and Sex, his distinctions between Real and Unreal, had but clogged my attempts at response with some revolting nastiness. This, however, now burst again into a glow before which my repugnance faded away. I felt that my resplendent womanhood made me indeed a goddess. Why should not its glory flash from my forehead with visible brilliance? Why does not my voice find a word, some audible cry, which would be like a sacred spell to my country for its fire initiation?

All of a sudden my maid Khema rushed into the room, dishevelled. "Give me my wages and let me go," she screamed. "Never in all my life have I been so . . ." The rest of her speech was drowned in sobs.

"What is the matter?"

Thako, the Bara Rani's maid, it appeared, had for no rhyme or reason reviled her in unmeasured terms. She was in such a state, it was no manner of use trying to pacify her by saying I would look into the matter afterwards.

The slime of domestic life that lay beneath the lotus bank of womanhood came to the surface. Rather than allow Sandip a prolonged vision of it, I had to hurry back within.

X

My sister−in−law was absorbed in her betel−nuts, the suspicion of a smile playing about her lips, as if nothing untoward had happened. She was still humming the same song.

"Why has your Thako been calling poor Khema names?" I burst out.

"Indeed? The wretch! I will have her broomed out of the house. What a shame to spoil your morning out like this! As for Khema, where are the hussy's manners to go and disturb you when you are engaged? Anyhow, Chota Rani, don't you worry yourself with these domestic squabbles. Leave them to me, and return to your friend."

How suddenly the wind in the sails of our mind veers round! This going to meet Sandip outside seemed, in the light of the zenana code, such an extraordinarily out−of−the−way thing to do that I went off to my own room, at a loss for a reply. I knew this was my sister−in−law's doing and that she had egged her maid on to contrive this scene. But I had brought myself to such an unstable poise that I dared not have my fling.

Why, it was only the other day that I found I could not keep up to the last the unbending hauteur with which I had demanded from my husband the dismissal of the man Nanku. I felt suddenly abashed when the Bara Rani came up and said: "It is really all my fault, brother dear. We are old−fashioned folk, and I did not quite like the ways of your Sandip Babu, so I only told the guard . . . but how was I to know that our Chota Rani would take this as an insult? I thought it would be the other way about! Just my incorrigible silliness!"

The thing which seems so glorious when viewed from the heights of the country's cause, looks so muddy when seen from the bottom. One begins by getting angry, and then feels disgusted.

I shut myself into my room, sitting by the window, thinking how easy life would be if only one could keep in harmony with one's surroundings. How simply the senior Rani sits in her verandah with her betel−nuts and how inaccessible to me has become my natural seat beside my daily duties! Where will it all end, I asked myself? Shall I ever recover, as from a delirium, and forget it all; or am I to be dragged to depths from which there can be no escape in this life? How on earth did I manage to let my good fortune escape me, and spoil my life so? Every wall of this bedroom of mine, which I first entered nine years ago as a bride, stares at me in dismay.

When my husband came home, after his M.A. examination, he brought for me this orchid belonging to some far−away land beyond the seas. From beneath these few little leaves sprang such a cascade of blossoms, it looked as if they were pouring forth from some overturned urn of Beauty. We decided, together, to hang it here, over this window. It flowered only that once, but we have always been in hope of its doing so once more. Curiously enough I have kept on watering it these days, from force of habit, and it is still green.

It is now four years since I framed a photograph of my husband in ivory and put it in the niche over there. If I happen to look that way I have to lower my eyes. Up to last week I used regularly to put there the flowers of

my worship, every morning after my bath. My husband has often chided me over this.

"It shames me to see you place me on a height to which I do not belong," he said one day.

"What nonsense!"

"I am not only ashamed, but also jealous!"

"Just hear him! Jealous of whom, pray?"

"Of that false me. It only shows that I am too petty for you, that you want some extraordinary man who can overpower you with his superiority, and so you needs must take refuge in making for yourself another 'me'."

"This kind of talk only makes me angry," said I.

"What is the use of being angry with me?" he replied. "Blame your fate which allowed you no choice, but made you take me blindfold. This keeps you trying to retrieve its blunder by making me out a paragon."

I felt so hurt at the bare idea that tears started to my eyes that day. And whenever I think of that now, I cannot raise my eyes to the niche.

For now there is another photograph in my jewel case. The other day, when arranging the sitting−room, I brought away that double photo frame, the one in which Sandip's portrait was next to my husband's. To this portrait I have no flowers of worship to offer, but it remains hidden away under my gems. It has all the greater fascination because kept secret. I look at it now and then with doors closed. At night I turn up the lamp, and sit with it in my hand, gazing and gazing. And every night I think of burning it in the flame of the lamp, to be done with it for ever; but every night I heave a sigh and smother it again in my pearls and diamonds.

Ah, wretched woman! What a wealth of love was twined round each one of those jewels! Oh, why am I not dead?

Sandip had impressed it on me that hesitation is not in the nature of woman. For her, neither right nor left has any existence she only moves forward. When the women of our country wake up, he repeatedly insisted, their voice will be unmistakably confident in its utterance of the cry: "I want."

"I want!" Sandip went on one day this was the primal word at the root of all creation. It had no maxim to guide it, but it became fire and wrought itself into suns and stars. Its partiality is terrible. Because it had a desire for man, it ruthlessly sacrificed millions of beasts for millions of years to achieve that desire. That terrible word "I want" has taken flesh in woman, and therefore men, who are cowards, try with all their might to keep back this primeval flood With their earthen dykes. They are afraid lest, laughing and dancing as it goes, it should wash away all the hedges and props of their pumpkin field. Men, in every age, flatter themselves that they have secured this force within the bounds of their convenience, but it gathers and grows. Now it is calm and deep like a lake, but gradually its pressure will increase, the dykes will give way, and the force which has so long been dumb will rush forward with the roar: "I want!"

These words of Sandip echo in my heart−beats like a war−drum. They shame into silence all my conflicts with myself. What do I care what people may think of me? Of what value are that orchid and that niche in my bedroom? What power have they to belittle me, to put me to shame? The primal fire of creation burns in me.

I felt a strong desire to snatch down the orchid and fling it out of the window, to denude the niche of its

picture, to lay bare and naked the unashamed spirit of destruction that raged within me. My arm was raised to do it, but a sudden pang passed through my breast, tears started to my eyes. I threw myself down and sobbed: "What is the end of all this, what is the end?"

Sandip's Story

IV

When I read these pages of the story of my life I seriously question myself: Is this Sandip? Am I made of words? Am I merely a book with a covering of flesh and blood?

The earth is not a dead thing like the moon. She breathes. Her rivers and oceans send up vapours in which she is clothed. She is covered with a mantle of her own dust which flies about the air. The onlooker, gazing upon the earth from the outside, can see only the light reflected from this vapour and this dust. The tracks of the mighty continents are not distinctly visible.

The man, who is alive as this earth is, is likewise always enveloped in the mist of the ideas which he is breathing out. His real land and water remain hidden, and he appears to be made of only lights and shadows.

It seems to me, in this story of my life, that, like a living plant, I am displaying the picture of an ideal world. But I am not merely what I want, what I think I am also what I do not love, what I do not wish to be. My creation had begun before I was born. I had no choice in regard to my surroundings and so must make the best of such material as comes to my hand.

My theory of life makes me certain that the Great is cruel To be just is for ordinary men it is reserved for the great to be unjust. The surface of the earth was even. The volcano butted it with its fiery horn and found its own eminence its justice was not towards its obstacle, but towards itself. Successful injustice and genuine cruelty have been the only forces by which individual or nation has become millionaire or monarch.

That is why I preach the great discipline of Injustice. I say to everyone: Deliverance is based upon injustice. Injustice is the fire which must keep on burning something in order to save itself from becoming ashes. Whenever an individual or nation becomes incapable of perpetrating injustice it is swept into the dust−bin of the world.

As yet this is only my idea it is not completely myself. There are rifts in the armour through which something peeps out which is extremely soft and sensitive. Because, as I say, the best part of myself was created before I came to this stage of existence.

From time to time I try my followers in their lesson of cruelty. One day we went on a picnic. A goat was grazing by. I asked them: "Who is there among you that can cut off a leg of that goat, alive, with this knife, and bring it to me?" While they all hesitated, I went myself and did it. One of them fainted at the sight. But when they saw me unmoved they took the dust of my feet, saying that I was above all human weaknesses. That is to say, they saw that day the vaporous envelope which was my idea, but failed to perceive the inner me, which by a curious freak of fate has been created tender and merciful.

In the present chapter of my life, which is growing in interest every day round Bimala and Nikhil, there is also much that remains hidden underneath. This malady of ideas which afflicts me is shaping my life within: nevertheless a great part of my life remains outside its influence; and so there is set up a discrepancy between my outward life and its inner design which I try my best to keep concealed even from myself; otherwise it may wreck not only my plans, but my very life.

Life is indefinite a bundle of contradictions. We men, with our ideas, strive to give it a particular shape by melting it into a particular mould into the definiteness of success. All the world−conquerors, from Alexander down to the American millionaires, mould themselves into a sword or a mint, and thus find that distinct image of themselves which is the source of their success.

The chief controversy between Nikhil and myself arises from this: that though I say "know thyself", and Nikhil also says "know thyself", his interpretation makes this "knowing" tantamount to "not knowing".

"Winning your kind of success," Nikhil once objected, "is success gained at the cost of the soul: but the soul is greater than success."

I simply said in answer: "Your words are too vague."

"That I cannot help," Nikhil replied. "A machine is distinct enough, but not so life. If to gain distinctness you try to know life as a machine, then such mere distinctness cannot stand for truth. The soul is not as distinct as success, and so you only lose your soul if you seek it in your success."

"Where, then, is this wonderful soul?"

"Where it knows itself in the infinite and transcends its success."

"But how does all this apply to our work for the country?"

"It is the same thing. Where our country makes itself the final object, it gains success at the cost of the soul. Where it recognizes the Greatest as greater than all, there it may miss success, but gains its soul."

"Is there any example of this in history?"

"Man is so great that he can despise not only the success, but also the example. Possibly example is lacking, just as there is no example of the flower in the seed. But there is the urgence of the flower in the seed all the same."

It is not that I do not at all understand Nikhil's point of view; that is rather where my danger lies. I was born in India and the poison of its spirituality runs in my blood. However loudly I may proclaim the madness of walking in the path of self−abnegation, I cannot avoid it altogether.

This is exactly how such curious anomalies happen nowadays in our country. We must have our religion and also our nationalism; our *Bhagavadgita* and also our *Bande Mataram*. The result is that both of them suffer. It is like performing with an English military band, side by side with our Indian festive pipes. I must make it the purpose of my life to put an end to this hideous confusion.

I want the western military style to prevail, not the Indian. We shall then not be ashamed of the flag of our passion, which mother Nature has sent with us as our standard into the battlefield of life. Passion is beautiful and pure pure as the lily that comes out of the slimy soil. It rises superior to its defilement and needs no Pears' soap to wash it clean.

V

A question has been worrying me the last few days. Why am I allowing my life to become entangled with Bimala's? Am I a drifting log to be caught up at any and every obstacle?

Not that I have any false shame at Bimala becoming an object of my desire. It is only too clear how she wants me, and so I look on her as quite legitimately mine. The fruit hangs on the branch by the stem, but that is no reason why the claim of the stem should be eternal. Ripe fruit cannot for ever swear by its slackening stem−hold. All its sweetness has been accumulated for me; to surrender itself to my hand is the reason of its existence, its very nature, its true morality. So I must pluck it, for it becomes me not to make it futile.

But what is teasing me is that I am getting entangled. Am I not born to rule? to bestride my proper steed, the crowd, and drive it as I will; the reins in my hand, the destination known only to me, and for it the thorns, the mire, on the road? This steed now awaits me at the door, pawing and champing its bit, its neighing filling the skies. But where am I, and what am I about, letting day after day of golden opportunity slip by?

I used to think I was like a storm that the torn flowers with which I strewed my path would not impede my progress. But I am only wandering round and round a flower like a bee not a storm. So, as I was saying, the colouring of ideas which man gives himself is only superficial. The inner man remains as ordinary as ever. If someone, who could see right into me, were to write my biography, he would make me out to be no different from that lout of a Panchu, or even from Nikhil!

Last night I was turning over the pages of my old diary . . . I had just graduated, and my brain was bursting with philosophy. Even so early I had vowed not to harbour any illusions, whether of my own or others" imagining, but to build my life on a solid basis of reality. But what has since been its actual story? Where is its solidity? It has rather been a network, where, though the thread be continuous, more space is taken up by the holes. Fight as I may, these will not own defeat. Just as I was congratulating myself on steadily following the thread, here I am badly caught in a hole! For I have become susceptible to compunctions.

"I want it; it is here; let me take it" This is a clear−cut, straightforward policy. Those who can pursue its course with vigour needs must win through in the end. But the gods would not have it that such journey should be easy, so they have deputed the siren Sympathy to distract the wayfarer, to dim his vision with her tearful mist.

I can see that poor Bimala is struggling like a snared deer. What a piteous alarm there is in her eyes! How she is torn with straining at her bonds! This sight, of course, should gladden the heart of a true hunter. And so do I rejoice; but, then, I am also touched; and therefore I dally, and standing on the brink I am hesitating to pull the noose fast.

There have been moments, I know, when I could have bounded up to her, clasped her hands and folded her to my breast, unresisting. Had I done so, she would not have said one word. She was aware that some crisis was impending, which in a moment would change the meaning of the whole world. Standing before that cavern of the incalculable but yet expected, her face went pale and her eyes glowed with a fearful ecstasy. Within that moment, when it arrives, an eternity will take shape, which our destiny awaits, holding its breath.

But I have let this moment slip by. I did not, with uncompromising strength, press the almost certain into the absolutely assured. I now see clearly that some hidden elements in my nature have openly ranged themselves as obstacles in my path.

That is exactly how Ravana, whom I look upon as the real hero of the *Ramayana,* met with his doom. He kept Sita in his Asoka garden, awaiting her pleasure, instead of taking her straight into his harem. This weak spot in his otherwise grand character made the whole of the abduction episode futile. Another such touch of compunction made him disregard, and be lenient to, his traitorous brother Bibhisan, only to get himself killed for his pains.

Thus does the tragic in life come by its own. In the beginning it lies, a little thing, in some dark under−vault,

and ends by overthrowing the whole superstructure. The real tragedy is, that man does not know himself for what he really is.

VI

Then again there is Nikhil. Crank though he be, laugh at him as I may, I cannot get rid of the idea that he is my friend. At first I gave no thought to his point of view, but of late it has begun to shame and hurt me. Therefore I have been trying to talk and argue with him in the same enthusiastic way as of old, but it does not ring true. It is even leading me at times into such a length of unnaturalness as to pretend to agree with him. But such hypocrisy is not in my nature, nor in that of Nikhil either. This, at least, is something we have in common. That is why, nowadays, I would rather not come across him, and have taken to fighting shy of his presence.

All these are signs of weakness. No sooner is the possibility of a wrong admitted than it becomes actual, and clutches you by the throat, however you may then try to shake off all belief in it. What I should like to be able to tell Nikhil frankly is, that happenings such as these must be looked in the face as great Realities and that which is the Truth should not be allowed to stand between true friends.

There is no denying that I have really weakened. It was not this weakness which won over Bimala; she burnt her wings in the blaze of the full strength of my unhesitating manliness. Whenever smoke obscures its lustre she also becomes confused, and draws back. Then comes a thorough revulsion of feeling, and she fain would take back the garland she has put round my neck, but cannot; and so she only closes her eyes, to shut it out of sight.

But all the same I must not swerve from the path I have chalked out. It would never do to abandon the cause of the country, especially at the present time. I shall simply make Bimala one with my country. The turbulent west wind which has swept away the country's veil of conscience, will sweep away the veil of the wife from Bimala's face, and in that uncovering there will be no shame. The ship will rock as it bears the crowd across the ocean, flying the pennant of *Bande Mataram*, and it will serve as the cradle to my power, as well as to my love.

Bimala will see such a majestic vision of deliverance, that her bonds will slip from about her, without shame, without her even being aware of it. Fascinated by the beauty of this terrible wrecking power, she will not hesitate a moment to be cruel. I have seen in Bimala's nature the cruelty which is the inherent force of existence the cruelty which with its unrelenting might keeps the world beautiful.

If only women could be set free from the artificial fetters put round them by men, we could see on earth the living image of Kali, the shameless, pitiless goddess. I am a worshipper of Kali, and one day I shall truly worship her, setting Bimala on her altar of Destruction. For this let me get ready.

The way of retreat is absolutely closed for both of us. We shall despoil each other: get to hate each other: but never more be free.

Chapter Five

Nikhil's Story

IV

EVERYTHING is rippling and waving with the flood of August. The young shoots of rice have the sheen of an infant's limbs. The water has invaded the garden next to our house. The morning light, like the love of the blue sky, is lavished upon the earth . . . Why cannot I sing? The water of the distant river is shimmering with light; the leaves are glistening; the rice−fields, with their fitful shivers, break into gleams of gold; and in this symphony of Autumn, only I remain voiceless. The sunshine of the world strikes my heart, but is not reflected back.

When I realize the lack of expressiveness in myself, I know why I am deprived. Who could bear my company day and night without a break? Bimala is full of the energy of life, and so she has never become stale to me for a moment, in all these nine years of our wedded life.

My life has only its dumb depths; but no murmuring rush. I can only receive: not impart movement. And therefore my company is like fasting. I recognize clearly today that Bimala has been languishing because of a famine of companionship.

Then whom shall I blame? Like Vidyapati I can only lament:

> It is August, the sky breaks into a passionate rain;
> Alas, empty is my house.

My house, I now see, was built to remain empty, because its doors cannot open. But I never knew till now that its divinity had been sitting outside. I had fondly believed that she had accepted my sacrifice, and granted in return her boon. But, alas, my house has all along been empty.

Every year, about this time, it was our practice to go in a house−boat over the broads of Samalda. I used to tell Bimala that a song must come back to its refrain over and over again. The original refrain of every song is in Nature, where the rain−laden wind passes over the rippling stream, where the green earth, drawing its shadow−veil over its face, keeps its ear close to the speaking water. There, at the beginning of time, a man and a woman first met not within walls. And therefore we two must come back to Nature, at least once a year, to tune our love anew to the first pure note of the meeting of hearts.

The first two anniversaries of our married life I spent in Calcutta, where I went through my examinations. But from the next year onwards, for seven years without a break, we have celebrated our union among the blossoming water−lilies. Now begins the next octave of my life.

It was difficult for me to ignore the fact that the same month of August had come round again this year. Does Bimala remember it, I wonder? she has given me no reminder. Everything is mute about me.

> It is August, the sky breaks into a passionate rain;
> And empty is my house.

The house which becomes empty through the parting of lovers, still has music left in the heart of its emptiness. But the house that is empty because hearts are asunder, is awful in its silence. Even the cry of pain is out of place there.

This cry of pain must be silenced in me. So long as I continue to suffer, Bimala will never have true freedom. I must free her completely, otherwise I shall never gain my freedom from untruth . . .

I think I have come to the verge of understanding one thing. Man has so fanned the flame of the loves of men

and women, as to make it overpass its rightful domain, and now, even in the name of humanity itself, he cannot bring it back under control. Man's worship has idolized his passion. But there must be no more human sacrifices at its shrine . . .

I went into my bedroom this morning, to fetch a book. It is long since I have been there in the day−time. A pang passed through me as I looked round it today, in the morning light. On the clothes rack was hanging a *sari* of Bimala's, crinkled ready for wear. On the dressing−table were her perfumes, her comb, her hair−pins, and with them, still, her vermilion box! Underneath were her tiny gold−embroidered slippers.

Once, in the old days, when Bimala had not yet overcome her objections to shoes, I had got these out from Lucknow, to tempt her. The first time she was ready to drop for very shame, to go in them even from the room to the verandah. Since then she has worn out many shoes, but has treasured up this pair. When first showing her the slippers, I chaffed her over a curious practice of hers; "I have caught you taking the dust of my feet, thinking me asleep! These are the offerings of my worship to ward the dust off the feet of my wakeful divinity." "You must not say such things," she protested, "or I will never wear your shoes!"

This bedroom of mine it has a subtle atmosphere which goes straight to my heart. I was never aware, as I am today, how my thirsting heart has been sending out its roots to cling round each and every familiar object. The severing of the main root, I see, is not enough to set life free. Even these little slippers serve to hold one back.

My wandering eyes fall on the niche. My portrait there is looking the same as ever, in spite of the flowers scattered round it having been withered black! Of all the things in the room their greeting strikes me as sincere. They are still here simply because it was not felt worth while even to remove them. Never mind; let me welcome truth, albeit in such sere and sorry garb, and look forward to the time when I shall be able to do so unmoved, as does my photograph.

As I stood there, Bimal came in from behind. I hastily turned my eyes from the niche to the shelves as I muttered: "I came to get Amiel's Journal." What need had Ito volunteer an explanation? I felt like a wrong−doer, a trespasser, prying into a secret not meant for me. I could not look Bimal in the face, but hurried away.

V

I had just made the discovery that it was useless to keep up a pretence of reading in my room outside, and also that it was equally beyond me to busy myself attending to anything at all so that all the days of my future bid fair to congeal into one solid mass and settle heavily on my breast for good when Panchu, the tenant of a neighbouring *zamindar*, came up to me with a basketful of cocoa−nuts and greeted me with a profound obeisance.

"Well, Panchu," said I. "What is all this for?"

I had got to know Panchu through my master. He was extremely poor, nor was I in a position to do anything for him; so I supposed this present was intended to procure a tip to help the poor fellow to make both ends meet. I took some money from my purse and held it out towards him, but with folded hands he protested: "I cannot take that, sir!"

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Let me make a clean breast of it, sir. Once, when I was hard pressed, I stole some cocoa−nuts from the garden here. I am getting old, and may die any day, so I have come to pay them back."

Amiel's Journal could not have done me any good that day. But these words of Panchu lightened my heart. There are more things in life than the union or separation of man and woman. The great world stretches far beyond, and one can truly measure one's joys and sorrows when standing in its midst.

Panchu was devoted to my master. I know well enough how he manages to eke out a livelihood. He is up before dawn every day, and with a basket of *pan* leaves, twists of tobacco, coloured cotton yarn, little combs, looking−glasses, and other trinkets beloved of the village women, he wades through the knee−deep water of the marsh and goes over to the Namasudra quarters. There he barters his goods for rice, which fetches him a little more than their price in money. If he can get back soon enough he goes out again, after a hurried meal, to the sweetmeat seller's, where he assists in beating sugar for wafers. As soon as he comes home he sits at his shell−bangle making, plodding on often till midnight. All this cruel toil does not earn, for himself and his family, a bare two meals a day during much more than half the year. His method of eating is to begin with a good filling draught of water, and his staple food is the cheapest kind of seedy banana. And yet the family has to go with only one meal a day for the rest of the year.

At one time I had an idea of making him a charity allowance, "But," said my master, "your gift may destroy the man, it cannot destroy the hardship of his lot. Mother Bengal has not only this one Panchu. If the milk in her breasts has run dry, that cannot be supplied from the outside."

These are thoughts which give one pause, and I decided to devote myself to working it out. That very day I said to Bimal: "Let us dedicate our lives to removing the root of this sorrow in our country."

"You are my Prince Siddharta, [17] I see," she replied with a smile. "But do not let the torrent of your feelings end by sweeping me away also!"

"Siddharta took his vows alone. I want ours to be a joint arrangement."

The idea passed away in talk. The fact is, Bimala is at heart what is called a "lady". Though her own people are not well off, she was born a Rani. She has no doubts in her mind that there is a lower unit of measure for the trials and troubles of the "lower classes". Want is, of course, a permanent feature of their lives, but does not necessarily mean "want" to them. Their very smallness protects them, as the banks protect the pool; by widening bounds only the slime is exposed.

The real fact is that Bimala has only come into my home, not into my life. I had magnified her so, leaving her such a large place, that when I lost her, my whole way of life became narrow and confined. I had thrust aside all other objects into a corner to make room for Bimala taken up as I was with decorating her and dressing her and educating her and moving round her day and night; forgetting how great is humanity and how nobly precious is man's life. When the actualities of everyday things get the better of the man, then is Truth lost sight of and freedom missed. So painfully important did Bimala make the mere actualities, that the truth remained concealed from me. That is why I find no gap in my misery, and spread this minute point of my emptiness over all the world. And so, for hours on this Autumn morning, the refrain has been humming in my ears:

> It is the month of August, and the sky breaks into a passionate rain;
> Alas, my house is empty.

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17. The name by which Buddha was known when a Prince, before renouncing the world.

Bimala's Story

XI

The change which had, in a moment, come over the mind of Bengal was tremendous. It was as if the Ganges had touched the ashes of the sixty thousand sons of Sagar [18] which no fire could enkindle, no other water knead again into living clay. The ashes of lifeless Bengal suddenly spoke up: "Here am I."

I have read somewhere that in ancient Greece a sculptor had the good fortune to impart life to the image made by his own hand. Even in that miracle, however, there was the process of form preceding life. But where was the unity in this heap of barren ashes? Had they been hard like stone, we might have had hopes of some form emerging, even as Ahalya, though turned to stone, at last won back her humanity. But these scattered ashes must have dropped to the dust through gaps in the Creator's fingers, to be blown hither and thither by the wind. They had become heaped up, but were never before united. Yet in this day which had come to Bengal, even this collection of looseness had taken shape, and proclaimed in a thundering voice, at our very door: "Here I am."

How could we help thinking that it was all supernatural? This moment of our history seemed to have dropped into our hand like a jewel from the crown of some drunken god. It had no resemblance to our past; and so we were led to hope that all our wants and miseries would disappear by the spell of some magic charm, that for us there was no longer any boundary line between the possible and the impossible. Everything seemed to be saying to us: "It is coming; it has come!"

Thus we came to cherish the belief that our history needed no steed, but that like heaven's chariot it would move with its own inherent power At least no wages would have to be paid to the charioteer; only his wine cup would have to be filled again and again. And then in some impossible paradise the goal of our hopes would be reached.

My husband was not altogether unmoved, but through all our excitement it was the strain of sadness in him which deepened and deepened. He seemed to have a vision of something beyond the surging present.

I remember one day, in the course of the arguments he continually had with Sandip, he said: "Good fortune comes to our gate and announces itself, only to prove that we have not the power to receive it that we have not kept things ready to be able to invite it into our house."

"No," was Sandip's answer. "You talk like an atheist because you do not believe in our gods. To us it has been made quite visible that the Goddess has come with her boon, yet you distrust the obvious signs of her presence."

"It is because I strongly believe in my God," said my husband, "that I feel so certain that our preparations for his worship are lacking. God has power to give the boon, but we must have power to accept it."

This kind of talk from my husband would only annoy me. I could not keep from joining in: "You think this excitement is only a fire of drunkenness, but does not drunkenness, up to a point, give strength?"

"Yes," my husband replied. "It may give strength, but not weapons."

"But strength is the gift of God," I went on. "Weapons can be supplied by mere mechanics."

My husband smiled. "The mechanics will claim their wages before they deliver their supplies," he said.

Sandip swelled his chest as he retorted: "Don't you trouble about that. Their wages shall be paid."

"I shall bespeak the festive music when the payment has been made, not before," my husband answered.

"You needn't imagine that we are depending on your bounty for the music," said Sandip scornfully. "Our festival is above all money payments."

And in his thick voice he began to sing:

> "My lover of the unpriced love, spurning payments,
> Plays upon the simple pipe, bought for nothing,
> Drawing my heart away."

Then with a smile he turned to me and said: "If I sing, Queen Bee, it is only to prove that when music comes into one's life, the lack of a good voice is no matter. When we sing merely on the strength of our tunefulness, the song is belittled. Now that a full flood of music has swept over our country, let Nikhil practise his scales, while we rouse the land with our cracked voices:

> "My house cries to me: Why go out to lose your all?
> My life says: All that you have, fling to the winds!
> If we must lose our all, let us lose it: what is it worth after all?
> If I must court ruin, let me do it smilingly;
> For my quest is the death−draught of immortality.

"The truth is, Nikhil, that we have all lost our hearts. None can hold us any longer within the bounds of the easily possible, in our forward rush to the hopelessly impossible.

> "Those who would draw us back,
> They know not the fearful joy of recklessness.
> They know not that we have had our call
> From the end of the crooked path.
> All that is good and straight and trim
> Let it topple over in the dust."

I thought that my husband was going to continue the discussion, but he rose silently from his seat and left us.

The thing that was agitating me within was merely a variation of the stormy passion outside, which swept the country from one end to the other. The car of the wielder of my destiny was fast approaching, and the sound of its wheels reverberated in my being. I had a constant feeling that something extraordinary might happen any moment, for which, however, the responsibility would not be mine. Was I not removed from the plane in which right and wrong, and the feelings of others, have to be considered? Had I ever wanted this had I ever been waiting or hoping for any such thing? Look at my whole life and tell me then, if I was in any way accountable.

Through all my past I had been consistent in my devotion but when at length it came to receiving the boon, a different god appeared! And just as the awakened country, with its *Bande Mataram*, thrills in salutation to the unrealized future before it, so do all my veins and nerves send forth shocks of welcome to the unthought−of, the unknown, the importunate Stranger.

One night I left my bed and slipped out of my room on to the open terrace. Beyond our garden wall are fields of ripening rice. Through the gaps in the village groves to the North, glimpses of the river are seen. The

whole scene slept in the darkness like the vague embryo of some future creation.

In that future I saw my country, a woman like myself, standing expectant. She has been drawn forth from her home corner by the sudden call of some Unknown. She has had no time to pause or ponder, or to light herself a torch, as she rushes forward into the darkness ahead. I know well how her very soul responds to the distant flute−strains which call her; how her breast rises and falls; how she feels she nears it, nay it is already hers, so that it matters not even if she run blindfold. She is no mother. There is no call to her of children in their hunger, no home to be lighted of an evening, no household work to be done. So; she hies to her tryst, for this is the land of the Vaishnava Poets. She has left home, forgotten domestic duties; she has nothing but an unfathomable yearning which hurries her on by what road, to what goal, she recks not.

I, also, am possessed of just such a yearning. I likewise have lost my home and also lost my way. Both the end and the means have become equally shadowy to me. There remain only the yearning and the hurrying on. Ah! wretched wanderer through the night, when the dawn reddens you will see no trace of a way to return. But why return? Death will serve as well. If the Dark which sounded the flute should lead to destruction, why trouble about the hereafter? When I am merged in its blackness, neither I, nor good and bad, nor laughter, nor tears, shall be any more!

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18. The condition of the curse which had reduced them to ashes was such that they could only be restored to life if the stream of the Ganges was brought down to them. [Trans.].

XII

In Bengal the machinery of time being thus suddenly run at full pressure, things which were difficult became easy, one following soon after another. Nothing could be held back any more, even in our corner of the country. In the beginning our district was backward, for my husband was unwilling to put any compulsion on the villagers. "Those who make sacrifices for their country's sake are indeed her servants," he would say, "but those who compel others to make them in her name are her enemies. They would cut freedom at the root, to gain it at the top."

But when Sandip came and settled here, and his followers began to move about the country, speaking in towns and market−places, waves of excitement came rolling up to us as well. A band of young fellows of the locality attached themselves to him, some even who had been known as a disgrace to the village. But the glow of their genuine enthusiasm lighted them up, within as well as without. It became quite clear that when the pure breezes of a great joy and hope sweep through the land, all dirt and decay are cleansed away. It is hard, indeed, for men to be frank and straight and healthy, when their country is in the throes of dejection.

Then were all eyes turned on my husband, from whose estates alone foreign sugar and salt and cloths had not been banished. Even the estate officers began to feel awkward and ashamed over it. And yet, some time ago, when my husband began to import country−made articles into our village, he had been secretly and openly twitted for his folly, by old and young alike. When *Swadeshi* had not yet become a boast, we had despised it with all our hearts.

My husband still sharpens his Indian−made pencils with his Indian−made knife, does his writing with reed pens, drinks his water out of a bell−metal vessel, and works at night in the light of an old−fashioned castor−oil lamp. But this dull, milk−and−water *Swadeshi* of his never appealed to us. Rather, we had always felt ashamed of the inelegant, unfashionable furniture of his reception−rooms, especially when he had the magistrate, or any other European, as his guest.

My husband used to make light of my protests. "Why allow such trifles to upset you?" he would say with a smile.

"They will think us barbarians, or at all events wanting in refinement."

"If they do, I will pay them back by thinking that their refinement does not go deeper than their white skins."

My husband had an ordinary brass pot on his writing−table which he used as a flower−vase. It has often happened that, when I had news of some European guest, I would steal into his room and put in its place a crystal vase of European make. "Look here, Bimala," he objected at length, "that brass pot is as unconscious of itself as those blossoms are; but this thing protests its purpose so loudly, it is only fit for artificial flowers."

The Bara Rani, alone, pandered to my husband's whims. Once she comes panting to say: "Oh, brother, have you heard? Such lovely Indian soaps have come out! My days of luxury are gone by; still, if they contain no animal fat, I should like to try some."

This sort of thing makes my husband beam all over, and the house is deluged with Indian scents and soaps. Soaps indeed! They are more like lumps of caustic soda. And do I not know that what my sister−in−law uses on herself are the European soaps of old, while these are made over to the maids for washing clothes?

Another time it is: "Oh, brother dear, do get me some of these new Indian pen−holders."

Her "brother" bubbles up as usual, and the Bara Rani's room becomes littered with all kinds of awful sticks that go by the name of *Swadeshi* pen−holders. Not that it makes any difference to her, for reading and writing are out of her line. Still, in her writing−case, lies the selfsame ivory pen−holder, the only one ever handled.

The fact is, all this was intended as a hit at me, because I would not keep my husband company in his vagaries. It was no good trying to show up my sister−in−law's insincerity; my husband's face would set so hard, if I barely touched on it. One only gets into trouble, trying to save such people from being imposed upon!

The Bara Rani loves sewing. One day I could not help blurting out: "What a humbug you are, sister! When your 'brother' is present, your mouth waters at the very mention of *Swadeshi* scissors, but it is the English−made article every time when you work."

"What harm?" she replied. "Do you not see what pleasure it gives him? We have grown up together in this house, since he was a boy. I simply cannot bear, as you can, the sight of the smile leaving his face. Poor dear, he has no amusement except this playing at shop−keeping. You are his only dissipation, and you will yet be his ruin!"

"Whatever you may say, it is not right to be double−faced," I retorted.

My sister−in−law laughed out in my face. "Oh, our artless little Chota Rani! straight as a schoolmaster's rod, eh? But a woman is not built that way. She is soft and supple, so that she may bend without being crooked."

I could not forget those words: "You are his dissipation, and will be his ruin!" Today I feel if a man needs must have some intoxicant, let it not be a woman.

XIII

Suksar, within our estates, is one of the biggest trade centres in the district. On one side of a stretch of water there is held a daily bazar; on the other, a weekly market. During the rains when this piece of water gets connected with the river, and boats can come through, great quantities of cotton yarns, and woollen stuffs for the coming winter, are brought in for sale.

At the height of our enthusiasm, Sandip laid it down that all foreign articles, together with the demon of foreign influence, must be driven out of our territory.

"Of course!" said I, girding myself up for a fight.

"I have had words with Nikhil about it," said Sandip. "He tells me, he does not mind speechifying, but he will not have coercion."

"I will see to that," I said, with a proud sense of power. I knew how deep was my husband's love for me. Had I been in my senses I should have allowed myself to be torn to pieces rather than assert my claim to that, at such a time. But Sandip had to be impressed with the full strength of my *Shakti*.

Sandip had brought home to me, in his irresistible way, how the cosmic Energy was revealed for each individual in the shape of some special affinity. Vaishnava Philosophy, he said, speaks of the *Shakti* of Delight that dwells in the heart of creation, ever attracting the heart of her Eternal Lover. Men have a perpetual longing to bring out this *Shakti* from the hidden depths of their own nature, and those of us who succeed in doing so at once clearly understand the meaning of the music coming to us from the Dark. He broke out singing:

> "My flute, that was busy with its song,
> Is silent now when we stand face to face.
> My call went seeking you from sky to sky
>   When you lay hidden;
> But now all my cry finds its smile
>   In the face of my beloved."

Listening to his allegories, I had forgotten that I was plain and simple Bimala. I was *Shakti*; also an embodiment of Universal joy. Nothing could fetter me, nothing was impossible for me; whatever I touched would gain new life. The world around me was a fresh creation of mine; for behold, before my heart's response had touched it, there had not been this wealth of gold in the Autumn sky! And this hero, this true servant of the country, this devotee of mine this flaming intelligence, this burning energy, this shining genius him also was I creating from moment to moment. Have I not seen how my presence pours fresh life into him time after time?

The other day Sandip begged me to receive a young lad, Amulya, an ardent disciple of his. In a moment I could see a new light flash out from the boy's eyes, and knew that he, too, had a vision of *Shakti* manifest, that my creative force had begun its work in his blood. "What sorcery is this of yours!" exclaimed Sandip next day. "Amulya is a boy no longer, the wick of his life is all ablaze. Who can hide your fire under your home−roof? Every one of them must be touched up by it, sooner or later, and when every lamp is alight what a grand carnival of a *Dewali* we shall have in the country!"

Blinded with the brilliance of my own glory I had decided to grant my devotee this boon. I was overweeningly confident that none could baulk me of what I really wanted. When I returned to my room after my talk with Sandip, I loosed my hair and tied it up over again. Miss Gilby had taught me a way of brushing

it up from the neck and piling it in a knot over my head. This style was a favourite one with my husband. "It is a pity," he once said, "that Providence should have chosen poor me, instead of poet Kalidas, for revealing all the wonders of a woman's neck. The poet would probably have likened it to a flower−stem; but I feel it to be a torch, holding aloft the black flame of your hair." With which he . . . but why, oh why, do I go back to all that?

I sent for my husband. In the old days I could contrive a hundred and one excuses, good or bad, to get him to come to me. Now that all this had stopped for days I had lost the art of contriving.

Nikhil's Story

VI

Panchu's wife has just died of a lingering consumption. Panchu must undergo a purification ceremony to cleanse himself of sin and to propitiate his community. The community has calculated and informed him that it will cost one hundred and twenty−three rupees.

"How absurd!" I cried, highly indignant. "Don't submit to this, Panchu. What can they do to you?"

Raising to me his patient eyes like those of a tired−out beast of burden, he said: "There is my eldest girl, sir, she will have to be married. And my poor wife's last rites have to be put through."

"Even if the sin were yours, Panchu," I mused aloud, "you have surely suffered enough for it already."

"That is so, sir," he naïvely assented. "I had to sell part of my land and mortgage the rest to meet the doctor's bills. But there is no escape from the offerings I have to make the Brahmins."

What was the use of arguing? When will come the time, I wondered, for the purification of the Brahmins themselves who can accept such offerings?

After his wife's illness and funeral, Panchu, who had been tottering on the brink of starvation, went altogether beyond his depth. In a desperate attempt to gain consolation of some sort he took to sitting at the feet of a wandering ascetic, and succeeded in acquiring philosophy enough to forget that his children went hungry. He kept himself steeped for a time in the idea that the world is vanity, and if of pleasure it has none, pain also is a delusion. Then, at last, one night he left his little ones in their tumble−down hovel, and started off wandering on his own account.

I knew nothing of this at the time, for just then a veritable ocean−churning by gods and demons was going on in my mind. Nor did my master tell me that he had taken Panchu's deserted children under his own roof and was caring for them, though alone in the house, with his school to attend to the whole day.

After a month Panchu came back, his ascetic fervour considerably worn off. His eldest boy and girl nestled up to him, crying: "Where have you been all this time, father?" His youngest boy filled his lap; his second girl leant over his back with her arms around his neck; and they all wept together. "O sir!" sobbed Panchu, at length, to my master. "I have not the power to give these little ones enough to eat I am not free to run away from them. What has been my sin that I should be scourged so, bound hand and foot?"

In the meantime the thread of Panchu's little trade connections had snapped and he found he could not resume them. He clung on to the shelter of my master's roof, which had first received him on his return, and said not a word of going back home. "Look here, Panchu," my master was at last driven to say. "If you don't take care

of your cottage, it will tumble down altogether. I will lend you some money with which you can do a bit of peddling and return it me little by little."

Panchu was not excessively pleased was there then no such thing as charity on earth? And when my master asked him to write out a receipt for the money, he felt that this favour, demanding a return, was hardly worth having. My master, however, did not care to make an outward gift which would leave an inward obligation. To destroy self−respect is to destroy caste, was his idea.

After signing the note, Panchu's obeisance to my master fell off considerably in its reverence the dust−taking was left out. It made my master smile; he asked nothing better than that courtesy should stoop less low. "Respect given and taken truly balances the account between man and man," was the way he put it, "but veneration is overpayment."

Panchu began to buy cloth at the market and peddle it about the village. He did not get much of cash payment, it is true, but what he could realize in kind, in the way of rice, jute, and other field produce, went towards settlement of his account. In two months" time he was able to pay back an instalment of my master's debt, and with it there was a corresponding reduction in the depth of his bow. He must have begun to feel that he had been revering as a saint a mere man, who had not even risen superior to the lure of lucre.

While Panchu was thus engaged, the full shock of the *Swadeshi* flood fell on him.

VII

It was vacation time, and many youths of our village and its neighbourhood had come home from their schools and colleges. They attached themselves to Sandip's leadership with enthusiasm, and some, in their excess of zeal, gave up their studies altogether. Many of the boys had been free pupils of my school here, and some held college scholarships from me in Calcutta. They came up in a body, and demanded that I should banish foreign goods from my Suksar market.

I told them I could not do it.

They were sarcastic: "Why, Maharaja, will the loss be too much for you?"

I took no notice of the insult in their tone, and was about to reply that the loss would fall on the poor traders and their customers, not on me, when my master, who was present, interposed.

"Yes, the loss will be his not yours, that is clear enough," he said.

"But for one's country . ."

"The country does not mean the soil, but the men on it," interrupted my master again. "Have you yet wasted so much as a glance on what was happening to them? But now you would dictate what salt they shall eat, what clothes they shall wear. Why should they put up with such tyranny, and why should we let them?"

"But we have taken to Indian salt and sugar and cloth ourselves."

"You may do as you please to work off your irritation, to keep up your fanaticism. You are well off, you need not mind the cost. The poor do not want to stand in your way, but you insist on their submitting to your compulsion. As it is, every moment of theirs is a life−and−death struggle for a bare living; you cannot even imagine the difference a few pice means to them so little have you in common. You have spent your whole past in a superior compartment, and now you come down to use them as tools for the wreaking of your wrath.

I call it cowardly."

They were all old pupils of my master, so they did not venture to be disrespectful, though they were quivering with indignation. They turned to me. "Will you then be the only one, Maharaja, to put obstacles in the way of what the country would achieve?"

"Who am I, that I should dare do such a thing? Would I not rather lay down my life to help it?"

The M.A. student smiled a crooked smile, as he asked: "May we enquire what you are actually doing to help?"

"I have imported Indian mill−made yarn and kept it for sale in my Suksar market, and also sent bales of it to markets belonging to neighbouring *zamindar*s."

"But we have been to your market, Maharaja," the same student exclaimed, "and found nobody buying this yarn."

"That is neither my fault nor the fault of my market. It only shows the whole country has not taken your vow."

"That is not all," my master went on. "It shows that what you have pledged yourselves to do is only to pester others. You want dealers, who have not taken your vow, to buy that yarn; weavers, who have not taken your vow, to make it up; then their wares eventually to be foisted on to consumers who, also, have not taken your vow. The method? Your clamour, and the *zamindars'* oppression. The result: all righteousness yours, all privations theirs!"

"And may we venture to ask, further, what your share of the privation has been?" pursued a science student.

"You want to know, do you?" replied my master. "It is Nikhil himself who has to buy up that Indian mill yarn; he has had to start a weaving school to get it woven; and to judge by his past brilliant business exploits, by the time his cotton fabrics leave the loom their cost will be that of cloth−of−gold; so they will only find a use, perhaps, as curtains for his drawing−room, even though their flimsiness may fail to screen him. When you get tired of your vow, you will laugh the loudest at their artistic effect. And if their workmanship is ever truly appreciated at all, it will be by foreigners."

I have known my master all my life, but have never seen him so agitated. I could see that the pain had been silently accumulating in his heart for some time, because of his surpassing love for me, and that his habitual self−possession had become secretly undermined to the breaking point.

"You are our elders," said the medical student. "It is unseemly that we should bandy words with you. But tell us, pray, finally, are you determined not to oust foreign articles from your market?"

"I will not," I said, "because they are not mine."

"Because that will cause you a loss!" smiled the M.A. student.

"Because he, whose is the loss, is the best judge," retorted my master.

With a shout of *Bande Mataram* they left us.

Chapter Six. Nikhil's Story

VIII

A FEW days later, my master brought Panchu round to me. His *zamindar*, it appeared, had fined him a hundred rupees, and was threatening him with ejectment.

"For what fault?" I enquired.

"Because," I was told, "he has been found selling foreign cloths. He begged and prayed Harish Kundu, his *zamindar*, to let him sell off his stock, bought with borrowed money, promising faithfully never to do it again; but the *zamindar* would not hear of it, and insisted on his burning the foreign stuff there and then, if he wanted to be let off. Panchu in his desperation blurted out defiantly: "I can't afford it! You are rich; why not buy it up and burn it?" This only made Harish Kundu red in the face as he shouted: "The scoundrel must be taught manners, give him a shoe−beating!" So poor Panchu got insulted as well as fined."

"What happened to the cloth?"

"The whole bale was burnt."

"Who else was there?"

"Any number of people, who all kept shouting *Bande Mataram.* Sandip was also there. He took up some of the ashes, crying: 'Brothers! This is the first funeral pyre lighted by your village in celebration of the last rites of foreign commerce. These are sacred ashes. Smear yourselves with them in token of your *Swadeshi* vow.'"

"Panchu," said I, turning to him, "you must lodge a complaint."

"No one will bear me witness," he replied.

"None bear witness? Sandip! Sandip!"

Sandip came out of his room at my call. "What is the matter?" he asked.

"Won't you bear witness to the burning of this man's cloth?"

Sandip smiled. "Of course I shall be a witness in the case," he said. "But I shall be on the opposite side."

"What do you mean," I exclaimed, "by being a witness on this or that side? Will you not bear witness to the truth?"

"Is the thing which happens the only truth?"

"What other truths can there be?"

"The things that ought to happen! The truth we must build up will require a great deal of untruth in the process. Those who have made their way in the world have created truth, not blindly followed it."

"And so "

"And so I will bear what you people are pleased to call false witness, as they have done who have created empires, built up social systems, founded religious organizations. Those who would rule do not dread untruths; the shackles of truth are reserved for those who will fall under their sway. Have you not read history? Do you not know that in the immense cauldrons, where vast political developments are simmering, untruths are the main ingredients?"

"Political cookery on a large scale is doubtless going on, but "

"Oh, I know! You, of course, will never do any of the cooking. You prefer to be one of those down whose throats the hotchpotch which is being cooked will be crammed. They will partition Bengal and say it is for your benefit. They will seal the doors of education and call it raising the standard. But you will always remain good boys, snivelling in your corners. We bad men, however, must see whether we cannot erect a defensive fortification of untruth."

"It is no use arguing about these things, Nikhil," my master interposed. "How can they who do not feel the truth within them, realize that to bring it out from its obscurity into the light is man's highest aim not to keep on heaping material outside?"

Sandip laughed. "Right, sir!" said he. "Quite a correct speech for a schoolmaster. That is the kind of stuff I have read in books; but in the real world I have seen that man's chief business is the accumulation of outside material. Those who are masters in the art, advertise the biggest lies in their business, enter false accounts in their political ledgers with their broadest−pointed pens, launch their newspapers daily laden with untruths, and send preachers abroad to disseminate falsehood like flies carrying pestilential germs. I am a humble follower of these great ones. When I was attached to the Congress party I never hesitated to dilute ten per cent of truth with ninety per cent of untruth. And now, merely because I have ceased to belong to that party, I have not forgotten the basic fact that man's goal is not truth but success."

"True success," corrected my master.

"Maybe," replied Sandip, "but the fruit of true success ripens only by cultivating the field of untruth, after tearing up the soil and pounding it into dust. Truth grows up by itself like weeds and thorns, and only worms can expect to get fruit from it!" With this he flung out of the room.

My master smiled as he looked towards me. "Do you know, Nikhil," he said, "I believe Sandip is not irreligious his religion is of the obverse side of truth, like the dark moon, which is still a moon, for all that its light has gone over to the wrong side."

"That is why," I assented, "I have always had an affection for him, though we have never been able to agree. I cannot contemn him, even now; though he has hurt me sorely, and may yet hurt me more."

"I have begun to realize that," said my master. "I have long wondered how you could go on putting up with him. I have, at times, even suspected you of weakness. I now see that though you two do not rhyme, your rhythm is the same."

"Fate seems bent on writing *Paradise Lost* in blank verse, in my case, and so has no use for a rhyming friend!" I remarked, pursuing his conceit.

"But what of Panchu?" resumed my master.

"You say Harish Kundu wants to eject him from his ancestral holding. Supposing I buy it up and then keep him on as my tenant?"

"And his fine?"

"How can the *zamindar* realize that if he becomes my tenant?"

"His burnt bale of cloth?"

"I will procure him another. I should like to see anyone interfering with a tenant of mine, for trading as he pleases!"

"I am afraid, sir," interposed Panchu despondently, "while you big folk are doing the fighting, the police and the law vultures will merrily gather round, and the crowd will enjoy the fun, but when it comes to getting killed, it will be the turn of only poor me!"

"Why, what harm can come to you?"

"They will burn down my house, sir, children and all!"

"Very well, I will take charge of your children," said my master. "You may go on with any trade you like. They shan't touch you."

That very day I bought up Panchu's holding and entered into formal possession. Then the trouble began.

Panchu had inherited the holding of his grandfather as his sole surviving heir. Everybody knew this. But at this juncture an aunt turned up from somewhere, with her boxes and bundles, her rosary, and a widowed niece. She ensconced herself in Panchu's home and laid claim to a life interest in all he had.

Panchu was dumbfounded. "My aunt died long ago," he protested.

In reply he was told that he was thinking of his uncle's first wife, but that the former had lost no time in taking to himself a second.

"But my uncle died before my aunt," exclaimed Panchu, still more mystified. "Where was the time for him to marry again?"

This was not denied. But Panchu was reminded that it had never been asserted that the second wife had come after the death of the first, but the former had been married by his uncle during the latter's lifetime. Not relishing the idea of living with a co−wife she had remained in her father's house till her husband's death, after which she had got religion and retired to holy Brindaban, whence she was now coming. These facts were well known to the officers of Harish Kundu, as well as to some of his tenants. And if the *zamindar*'s summons should be peremptory enough, even some of those who had partaken of the marriage feast would be forthcoming!

IX

One afternoon, when I happened to be specially busy, word came to my office room that Bimala had sent for me. I was startled.

"Who did you say had sent for me?" I asked the messenger.

"The Rani Mother."

"The Bara Rani?"

"No, sir, the Chota Rani Mother."

The Chota Rani! It seemed a century since I had been sent for by her. I kept them all waiting there, and went off into the inner apartments. When I stepped into our room I had another shock of surprise to find Bimala there with a distinct suggestion of being dressed up. The room, which from persistent neglect had latterly acquired an air of having grown absent−minded, had regained something of its old order this afternoon. I stood there silently, looking enquiringly at Bimala.

She flushed a little and the fingers of her right hand toyed for a time with the bangles on her left arm. Then she abruptly broke the silence. "Look here! Is it right that ours should be the only market in all Bengal which allows foreign goods?"

"What, then, would be the right thing to do?" I asked.

"Order them to be cleared out!"

"But the goods are not mine."

"Is not the market yours?"

"It is much more theirs who use it for trade."

"Let them trade in Indian goods, then."

"Nothing would please me better. But suppose they do not?"

"Nonsense! How dare they be so insolent? Are you not . . ."

"I am very busy this afternoon and cannot stop to argue it out. But I must refuse to tyrannize."

"It would not be tyranny for selfish gain, but for the sake of the country."

"To tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country. But that I am afraid you will never understand." With this I came away.

All of a sudden the world shone out for me with a fresh clearness. I seemed to feel it in my blood, that the Earth had lost the weight of its earthiness, and its daily task of sustaining life no longer appeared a burden, as with a wonderful access of power it whirled through space telling its beads of days and nights. What endless work, and withal what illimitable energy of freedom! None shall check it, oh, none can ever check it! From the depths of my being an uprush of joy, like a waterspout, sprang high to storm the skies.

I repeatedly asked myself the meaning of this outburst of feeling. At first there was no intelligible answer. Then it became clear that the bond against which I had been fretting inwardly, night and day, had broken. To my surprise I discovered that my mind was freed from all mistiness. I could see everything relating to Bimala as if vividly pictured on a camera screen. It was palpable that she had specially dressed herself up to coax that order out of me. Till that moment, I had never viewed Bimala's adornment as a thing apart from herself. But today the elaborate manner in which she had done up her hair, in the English fashion, made it appear a mere decoration. That which before had the mystery of her personality about it, and was priceless to me, was now out to sell itself cheap.

As I came away from that broken cage of a bedroom, out into the golden sunlight of the open, there was the avenue of bauhinias, along the gravelled path in front of my verandah, suffusing the sky with a rosy flush. A group of starlings beneath the trees were noisily chattering away. In the distance an empty bullock cart, with its nose on the ground, held up its tail aloft one of its unharnessed bullocks grazing, the other resting on the grass, its eyes dropping for very comfort, while a crow on its back was pecking away at the insects on its body.

I seemed to have come closer to the heartbeats of the great earth in all the simplicity of its daily life; its warm breath fell on me with the perfume of the bauhinia blossoms; and an anthem, inexpressibly sweet, seemed to peal forth from this world, where I, in my freedom, live in the freedom of all else.

We, men, are knights whose quest is that freedom to which our ideals call us. She who makes for us the banner under which we fare forth is the true Woman for us. We must tear away the disguise of her who weaves our net of enchantment at home, and know her for what she is. We must beware of clothing her in the witchery of our own longings and imaginings, and thus allow her to distract us from our true quest.

Today I feel that I shall win through. I have come to the gateway of the simple; I am now content to see things as they are. I have gained freedom myself; I shall allow freedom to others. In my work will be my salvation.

I know that, time and again, my heart will ache, but now that I understand its pain in all its truth, I can disregard it. Now that I know it concerns only me, what after all can be its value? The suffering which belongs to all mankind shall be my crown.

Save me, Truth! Never again let me hanker after the false paradise of Illusion. If I must walk alone, let me at least tread your path. Let the drum−beats of Truth lead me to Victory.

Sandip's Story

VII

Bimala sent for me that day, but for a time she could not utter a word; her eyes kept brimming up to the verge of overflowing. I could see at once that she had been unsuccessful with Nikhil. She had been so proudly confident that she would have her own way but I had never shared her confidence. Woman knows man well enough where he is weak, but she is quite unable to fathom him where he is strong. The fact is that man is as much a mystery to woman as woman is to man. If that were not so, the separation of the sexes would only have been a waste of Nature's energy.

Ah pride, pride! The trouble was, not that the necessary thing had failed of accomplishment, but that the entreaty, which had cost her such a struggle to make, should have been refused. What a wealth of colour and movement, suggestion and deception, group themselves round this "me" and "mine" in woman. That is just where her beauty lies she is ever so much more personal than man. When man was being made, the Creator was a schoolmaster His bag full of commandments and principles; but when He came to woman, He resigned His headmastership and turned artist, with only His brush and paint−box.

When Bimala stood silently there, flushed and tearful in her broken pride, like a storm−cloud, laden with rain and charged with lightning, lowering over the horizon, she looked so absolutely sweet that I had to go right up to her and take her by the hand. It was trembling, but she did not snatch it away. "Bee," said I, "we two are colleagues, for our aims are one. Let us sit down and talk it over."

I led her, unresisting, to a seat. But strange! at that very point the rush of my impetuosity suffered an unaccountable check just as the current of the mighty Padma, roaring on in its irresistible course, all of a sudden gets turned away from the bank it is crumbling by some trifling obstacle beneath the surface. When I pressed Bimala's hand my nerves rang music, like tuned−up strings; but the symphony stopped short at the first movement.

What stood in the way? Nothing singly; it was a tangle of a multitude of things nothing definitely palpable, but only that unaccountable sense of obstruction. Anyhow, this much has become plain to me, that I cannot swear to what I really am. It is because I am such a mystery to my own mind that my attraction for myself is so strong! If once the whole of myself should become known to me, I would then fling it all away and reach beatitude!

As she sat down, Bimala went ashy pale. She, too, must have realized what a crisis had come and gone, leaving her unscathed. The comet had passed by, but the brush of its burning tail had overcome her. To help her to recover herself I said: "Obstacles there will be, but let us fight them through, and not be down−hearted. Is not that best, Queen?"

Bimala cleared her throat with a little cough, but simply to murmur: "Yes."

"Let us sketch out our plan of action," I continued, as I drew a piece of paper and a pencil from my pocket.

I began to make a list of the workers who had joined us from Calcutta and to assign their duties to each. Bimala interrupted me before I was through, saying wearily: "Leave it now; I will join you again this evening" and then she hurried out of the room. It was evident she was not in a state to attend to anything. She must be alone with herself for a while perhaps lie down on her bed and have a good cry!

When she left me, my intoxication began to deepen, as the cloud colours grow richer after the sun is down. I felt I had let the moment of moments slip by. What an awful coward I had been! She must have left me in sheer disgust at my qualms and she was right!

While I was tingling all over with these reflections, a servant came in and announced Amulya, one of our boys. I felt like sending him away for the time, but he stepped in before I could make up my mind. Then we fell to discussing the news of the fights which were raging in different quarters over cloth and sugar and salt; and the air was soon clear of all fumes of intoxication. I felt as if awakened from a dream. I leapt to my feet feeling quite ready for the fray Bande Mataram!

The news was various. Most of the traders who were tenants of Harish Kundu had come over to us. Many of Nikhil's officials were also secretly on our side, pulling the wires in our interest. The Marwari shopkeepers were offering to pay a penalty, if only allowed to clear their present stocks. Only some Mahomedan traders were still obdurate.

One of them was taking home some German−made shawls for his family. These were confiscated and burnt by one of our village boys. This had given rise to trouble. We offered to buy him Indian woollen stuffs in their place. But where were cheap Indian woollens to be had? We could not very well indulge him in Cashmere shawls! He came and complained to Nikhil, who advised him to go to law. Of course Nikhil's men saw to it that the trial should come to nothing, even his law−agent being on our side!

The point is, if we have to replace burnt foreign clothes with Indian cloth every time, and on the top of that fight through a law−suit, where is the money to come from? And the beauty of it is that this destruction of foreign goods is increasing their demand and sending up the foreigner's profits very like what happened to the fortunate shopkeeper whose chandeliers the nabob delighted in smashing, tickled by the tinkle of the

breaking glass.

The next problem is since there is no such thing as cheap and gaudy Indian woollen stuff, should we be rigorous in our boycott of foreign flannels and memos, or make an exception in their favour?

"Look here!" said I at length on the first point, "we are not going to keep on making presents of Indian stuff to those who have got their foreign purchases confiscated. The penalty is intended to fall on them, not on us. If they go to law, we must retaliate by burning down their granaries! What startles you, Amulya? It is not the prospect of a grand illumination that delights me! You must remember, this is War. If you are afraid of causing suffering, go in for love−making, you will never do for this work!"

The second problem I solved by deciding to allow no compromise with foreign articles, in any circumstance whatever. In the good old days, when these gaily coloured foreign shawls were unknown, our peasantry used to manage well enough with plain cotton quilts they must learn to do so again. They may not look as gorgeous, but this is not the time to think of looks.

Most of the boatmen had been won over to refuse to carry foreign goods, but the chief of them, Mirjan, was still insubordinate.

"Could you not get his boat sunk?" I asked our manager here.

"Nothing easier, sir," he replied. "But what if afterwards I am held responsible?"

"Why be so clumsy as to leave any loophole for responsibility? However, if there must be any, my shoulders will be there to bear it."

Mirjan's boat was tied near the landing−place after its freight had been taken over to the market−place. There was no one on it, for the manager had arranged for some entertainment to which all had been invited. After dusk the boat, loaded with rubbish, was holed and set adrift. It sank in mid−stream.

Mirjan understood the whole thing. He came to me in tears to beg for mercy. "I was wrong, sir " he began.

"What makes you realize that all of a sudden?" I sneered.

He made no direct reply. "The boat was worth two thousand rupees," he said. "I now see my mistake, and if excused this time I will never . . ." with which he threw himself at my feet.

I asked him to come ten days later. If only we could pay him that two thousand rupees at once, we could buy him up body and soul. This is just the sort of man who could render us immense service, if won over. We shall never be able to make any headway unless we can lay our hands on plenty of money.

As soon as Bimala came into the sitting−room, in the evening, I said as I rose up to receive her: "Queen! Everything is ready, success is at hand, but we must have money.

"Money? How much money?"

"Not so very much, but by hook or by crook we must have it!"

"But how much?"

"A mere fifty thousand rupees will do for the present."

Bimala blenched inwardly at the figure, but tried not to show it. How could she again admit defeat?

"Queen!" said I, "you only can make the impossible possible. Indeed you have already done so. Oh, that I could show you the extent of your achievement then you would know it. But the time for that is not now. Now we want money!"

"You shall have it," she said.

I could see that the thought of selling her jewels had occurred to her. So I said: "Your jewels must remain in reserve. One can never tell when they may be wanted." And then, as Bimala stared blankly at me in silence, I went on: "This money must come from your husband's treasury."

Bimala was still more taken aback. After a long pause she said: "But how am Ito get his money?"

"Is not his money yours as well?"

"Ah, no!" she said, her wounded pride hurt afresh.

"If not," I cried, "neither is it his, but his country's, whom he has deprived of it, in her time of need!"

"But how am Ito get it?" she repeated.

"Get it you shall and must. You know best how. You must get it for Her to whom it rightfully belongs. *Bande Mataram*! These are the magic words which will open the door of his iron safe, break through the walls of his strong−room, and confound the hearts of those who are disloyal to its call. Say *Bande Mataram*, Bee!"

"*Bande Mataram*!"

Chapter Seven. Sandip's Story

VIII

WE are men, we are kings, we must have our tribute. Ever since we have come upon the Earth we have been plundering her; and the more we claimed, the more she submitted. From primeval days have we men been plucking fruits, cutting down trees, digging up the soil, killing beast, bird and fish. From the bottom of the sea, from underneath the ground, from the very jaws of death, it has all been grabbing and grabbing and grabbing no strong−box in Nature's store−room has been respected or left unrifled. The one delight of this Earth is to fulfil the claims of those who are men. She has been made fertile and beautiful and complete through her endless sacrifices to them. But for this, she would be lost in the wilderness, not knowing herself, the doors of her heart shut, her diamonds and pearls never seeing the light.

Likewise, by sheer force of our claims, we men have opened up all the latent possibilities of women. In the process of surrendering themselves to us, they have ever gained their true greatness. Because they had to bring all the diamonds of their happiness and the pearls of their sorrow into our royal treasury, they have found their true wealth. So for men to accept is truly to give: for women to give is truly to gain.

The demand I have just made from Bimala, however, is indeed a large one! At first I felt scruples; for is it not the habit of man's mind to be in purposeless conflict with itself? I thought I had imposed too hard a task. My first impulse was to call her back, and tell her I would rather not make her life wretched by dragging her into all these troubles. I forgot, for the moment, that it was the mission of man to be aggressive, to make woman's

existence fruitful by stirring up disquiet in the depth of her passivity, to make the whole world blessed by churning up the immeasurable abyss of suffering! This is why man's hands are so strong, his grip so firm. Bimala had been longing with all her heart that I, Sandip, should demand of her some great sacrifice should call her to her death. How else could she be happy? Had she not waited all these weary years only for an opportunity to weep out her heart so satiated was she with the monotony of her placid happiness? And therefore, at the very sight of me, her heart's horizon darkened with the rain clouds of her impending days of anguish. If I pity her and save her from her sorrows, what then was the purpose of my being born a man?

The real reason of my qualms is that my demand happens to be for money. That savours of beggary, for money is man's, not woman's. That is why I had to make it a big figure. A thousand or two would have the air of petty theft. Fifty thousand has all the expanse of romantic brigandage. Ah, but riches should really have been mine! So many of my desires have had to halt, again and again, on the road to accomplishment simply for want of money. This does not become me! Had my fate been merely unjust, it could be forgiven but its bad taste is unpardonable. It is not simply a hardship that a man like me should be at his wit's end to pay his house rent, or should have to carefully count out the coins for an Intermediate Class railway ticket it is vulgar!

It is equally clear that Nikhil's paternal estates are a superfluity to him. For him it would not have been at all unbecoming to be poor. He would have cheerfully pulled in the double harness of indigent mediocrity with that precious master of his. I should love to have, just for once, the chance to fling about fifty thousand rupees in the service of my country and to the satisfaction of myself. I am a nabob born, and it is a great dream of mine to get rid of this disguise of poverty, though it be for a day only, and to see myself in my true character. I have grave misgivings, however, as to Bimala ever getting that fifty thousand rupees within her reach, and it will probably be only a thousand or two which will actually come to hand. Be it so. The wise man is content with half a loaf, or any fraction for that matter, rather than no bread. I must return to these personal reflections of mine later. News comes that I am wanted at once. Something has gone wrong . . .

It seems that the police have got a clue to the man who sank Mirjan's boat for us. He was an old offender. They are on his trail, but he should be too practised a hand to be caught blabbing. However, one never knows. Nikhil's back is up, and his manager may not be able to have things his own way.

"If I get into trouble, sir," said the manager when I saw him, "I shall have to drag you in!"

"Where is the noose with which you can catch me?" I asked.

"I have a letter of yours, and several of Amulya Babu's." I could not see that the letter marked "urgent" to which I had been hurried into writing a reply was wanted urgently for this purpose only! I am getting to learn quite a number of things.

The point now is, that the police must be bribed and hush−money paid to Mirjan for his boat. It is also becoming evident that much of the cost of this patriotic venture of ours will find its way as profit into the pockets of Nikhil's manager. However, I must shut my eyes to that for the present, for is he not shouting *Bande Mataram* as lustily as I am?

This kind of work has always to be carried on with leaky vessels which let as much through as they fetch in. We all have a hidden fund of moral judgement stored away within us, and so I was about to wax indignant with the manager, and enter in my diary a tirade against the unreliability of our countrymen. But, if there be a god, I must acknowledge with gratitude to him that he has given me a clear−seeing mind, which allows nothing inside or outside it to remain vague. 1 may delude others, but never myself. So I was unable to continue angry.

Whatever is true is neither good nor bad, but simply true, and that is Science. A lake is only the remnant of water which has not been sucked into the ground. Underneath the cult of *Bande Mataram*, as indeed at the bottom of all mundane affairs, there is a region of slime, whose absorbing power must be reckoned with. The manager will take what he wants; I also have my own wants. These lesser wants form a part of the wants of the great Cause the horse must be fed and the wheels must be oiled if the best progress is to be made.

The long and short of it is that money we must have, and that soon. We must take whatever comes the readiest, for we cannot afford to wait. I know that the immediate often swallows up the ultimate; that the five thousand rupees of today may nip in the bud the fifty thousand rupees of tomorrow. But I must accept the penalty. Have I not often twitted Nikhil that they who walk in the paths of restraint have never known what sacrifice is? It is we greedy folk who have to sacrifice our greed at every step!

Of the cardinal sins of man, Desire is for men who are men but Delusion, which is only for cowards, hampers them. Because delusion keeps them wrapped up in past and future, but is the very deuce for confounding their footsteps in the present. Those who are always straining their ears for the call of the remote, to the neglect of the call of the imminent, are like Sakuntala [19] absorbed in the memories of her lover. The guest comes unheeded, and the curse descends, depriving them of the very object of their desire.

The other day I pressed Bimala's hand, and that touch still stirs her mind, as it vibrates in mine. Its thrill must not be deadened by repetition, for then what is now music will descend to mere argument. There is at present no room in her mind for the question "why?" So I must not deprive Bimala, who is one of those creatures for whom illusion is necessary, of her full supply of it.

As for me, I have so much else to do that I shall have to be content for the present with the foam of the wine cup of passion. O man of desire! Curb your greed, and practise your hand on the harp of illusion till you can bring out all the delicate nuances of suggestion. This is not the time to drain the cup to the dregs.

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19. Sakuntala, after the king, her lover, went back to his kingdom, promising to send for her, was so lost in thoughts of him, that she failed to hear the call of her hermit guest. who thereupon cursed her, saying that the object of her love would forget all about her. [Trans.].

IX

Our work proceeds apace. But though we have shouted ourselves hoarse, proclaiming the Mussulmans to be our brethren, we have come to realize that we shall never be able to bring them wholly round to our side. So they must be suppressed altogether and made to understand that we are the masters. They are now showing their teeth, but one day they shall dance like tame bears to the tune we play.

"If the idea of a United India is a true one," objects Nikhil, "Mussulmans are a necessary part of it."

"Quite so," said I, "but we must know their place and keep them there, otherwise they will constantly be giving trouble."

"So you want to make trouble to prevent trouble?"

"What, then, is your plan?"

"There is only one well−known way of avoiding quarrels," said Nikhil meaningly.

I know that, like tales written by good people, Nikhil's discourse always ends in a moraL The strange part of it is that with all his familiarity with moral precepts, he still believes in them! He is an incorrigible schoolboy. His only merit is his sincerity. The mischief with people like him is that they will not admit the finality even of death, but keep their eyes always fixed on a hereafter.

I have long been nursing a plan which, if only I could carry it out, would set fire to the whole country. True patriotism will never be roused in our countrymen unless they can visualize the motherland. We must make a goddess of her. My colleagues saw the point at once. "Let us devise an appropriate image!" they exclaimed. "It will not do if you devise− it," I admonished them. "We must get one of the current images accepted as representing the country the worship of the people must flow towards it along the deep−cut grooves of custom."

But Nikhil's needs must argue even about this. "We must not seek the help of illusions," he said to me some time ago,

"for what we believe to be the true cause."

"Illusions are necessary for lesser minds," I said, "and to this class the greater portion of the world belongs. That is why divinities are set up in every country to keep up the illusions of the people, for men are only too well aware of their weakness."

"No," he replied. "God is necessary to clear away our illusions. The divinities which keep them alive are false gods."

"What of that? If need be, even false gods must be invoked, rather than let the work suffer. Unfortunately for us, our illusions are alive enough, but we do not know how to make them serve our purpose. Look at the Brahmins. In spite of our treating them as demi−gods, and untiringly taking the dust of their feet, they are a force going to waste.

"There will always be a large class of people, given to grovelling, who can never be made to do anything unless they are bespattered with the dust of somebody's feet, be it on their heads or on their backs! What a pity if after keeping Brahmins saved up in our armoury for all these ages keen and serviceable they cannot be utilized to urge on this rabble in the time of our need."

But it is impossible to drive all this into Nikhil's head. He has such a prejudice in favour of truth as though there exists such an objective reality! How often have I tried to explain to him that where untruth truly exists, there it is indeed the truth. This was understood in our country in the old days, and so they had the courage to declare that for those of little understanding untruth is the truth. For them, who can truly believe their country to be a goddess, her image will do duty for the truth. With our nature and our traditions we are unable to realize our country as she is, but we can easily bring ourselves to believe in her image. Those who want to do real work must not ignore this fact.

Nikhil only got excited. "Because you have lost the power of walking in the path of truth's attainment," he cried, "you keep waiting for some miraculous boon to drop from the skies! That is why when your service to the country has fallen centuries into arrears all you can think of is, to make of it an image and stretch out your hands in expectation of gratuitous favours."

"We want to perform the impossible," I said. "So our country needs must be made into a god."

"You mean you have no heart for possible tasks," replied Nikhil. "Whatever is already there is to be left undisturbed; yet there must be a supernatural result:"

"Look here, Nikhil," I said at length, thoroughly exasperated.

"The things you have been saying are good enough as moral lessons. These ideas have served their purpose, as milk for babes, at one stage of man's evolution, but will no longer do, now that man has cut his teeth.

"Do we not see before our very eyes how things, of which we never even dreamt of sowing the seed, are sprouting up on every side? By what power? That of the deity in our country who is becoming manifest. It is for the genius of the age to give that deity its image. Genius does not argue, it creates. I only give form to what the country imagines.

"I will spread it abroad that the goddess has vouchsafed me a dream. I will tell the Brahmins that they have been appointed her priests, and that their downfall has been due to their dereliction of duty in not seeing to the proper performance of her worship. Do you say I shall be uttering lies? No, say I, it is the truth nay more, the truth which the country has so long been waiting to learn from my lips. If only I could get the opportunity to deliver my message, you would see the stupendous result."

"What I am afraid of," said Nikhil, "is, that my lifetime is limited and the result you speak of is not the final result. It will have after−effects which may not be immediately apparent."

"I only seek the result," said I, "which belongs to today."

"The result I seek," answered Nikhil, "belongs to all time."

Nikhil may have had his share of Bengal's greatest gift imagination, but he has allowed it to be overshadowed and nearly killed by an exotic conscientiousness. Just look at the worship of Durga which Bengal has carried to such heights. That is one of her greatest achievements. I can swear that Durga is a political goddess and was conceived as the image of the *Shakti* of patriotism in the days when Bengal was praying to be delivered from Mussulman domination. What other province of India has succeeded in giving such wonderful visual expression to the ideal of its quest?

Nothing betrayed Nikhil's loss of the divine gift of imagination more conclusively than his reply to me. "During the Mussulman domination," he said, "the Maratha and the Sikh asked for fruit from the arms which they themselves took up. The Bengali contented himself with placing weapons in the hands of his goddess and muttering incantations to her; and as his country did not really happen to be a goddess the only fruit he got was the lopped−off heads of the goats and buffaloes of the sacrifice. The day that we seek the good of the country along the path of righteousness, He who is greater than our country will grant us true fruition."

The unfortunate part of it is that Nikhil's words sound so fine when put down on paper. My words, however, are not meant to be scribbled on paper, but to be scored into the heart of the country. The Pandit records his Treatise on Agriculture in printer's ink; but the cultivator at the point of his plough impresses his endeavour deep in the soil.

X

When I next saw Bimala I pitched my key high without further ado. "Have we been able," I began, "to believe with all our heart in the god for whose worship we have been born all these millions of years, until he actually made himself visible to us?

"How often have I told you," I continued, "that had I not seen you I never would have known all my country as One. I know not yet whether you rightly understand me. The gods are invisible only in their heaven on earth they show themselves to mortal men."

Bimala looked at me in a strange kind of way as she gravely replied: "Indeed I understand you, Sandip." This was the first time she called me plain Sandip.

"Krishna," I continued, "whom Arjuna ordinarily knew only as the driver of his chariot, had also His universal aspect, of which, too, Arjuna had a vision one day, and that day he saw the Truth. I have seen your Universal Aspect in my country. The Ganges and the Brahmaputra are the chains of gold that wind round and round your neck; in the woodland fringes on the distant banks of the dark waters of the river, I have seen your collyrium−darkened eyelashes; the changeful sheen of your *sari* moves for me in the play of light and shade amongst the swaying shoots of green corn; and the blazing summer heat, which makes the whole sky lie gasping like a red−tongued lion in the desert, is nothing but your cruel radiance.

"Since the goddess has vouchsafed her presence to her votary in such wonderful guise, it is for me to proclaim her worship throughout our land, and then shall the country gain new life. 'Your image make we in temple after temple.' [20] But this our people have not yet fully realized. So I would call on them in your name and offer for their worship an image from which none shall be able to withhold belief. Oh give me this boon, this power."

Bimala's eyelids drooped and she became rigid in her seat like a figure of stone. Had I continued she would have gone off into a trance. When I ceased speaking she opened wide her eyes, and murmured with fixed gaze, as though still dazed: "O Traveller in the path of Destruction! Who is there that can stay your progress? Do I not see that none shall stand in the way of your desires? Kings shall lay their crowns at your feet; the wealthy shall hasten to throw open their treasure for your acceptance; those who have nothing else shall beg to be allowed to offer their lives. O my king, my god! What you have seen in me I know not, but I have seen the immensity of your grandeur in my heart. Who am I, what am I, in its presence? Ah, the awful power of Devastation! Never shall I truly live till it kills me utterly! I can bear it no longer, my heart is breaking!"

Bimala slid down from her seat and fell at my feet, which she clasped, and then she sobbed and sobbed and sobbed.

This is hypnotism indeed the charm which can subdue the world! No materials, no weapons but just the delusion of irresistible suggestion. Who says "Truth shall Triumph"?" [21] Delusion shall win in the end. The Bengali understood this when he conceived the image of the ten−handed goddess astride her lion, and spread her worship in the land. Bengal must now create a new image to enchant and conquer the world. *Bande Mataram* !

I gently lifted Bimala back into her chair, and lest reaction should set in, I began again without losing time: "Queen! The Divine Mother has laid on me the duty of establishing her worship in the land. But, alas, 1 am poor!"

Bimala was still flushed, her eyes clouded, her accents thick, as she replied: "You poor? Is not all that each one has yours? What are my caskets full of jewellery for? Drag away from me all my gold and gems for your worship. I have no use for them!"

Once before Bimala had offered up her ornaments. I am not usually in the habit of drawing lines, but I felt I had to draw the line there. [22] I know why I feel this hesitation. It is for man to give ornaments to woman; to take them from her wounds his manliness.

But I must forget myself. Am I taking them? They are for the Divine Mother, to be poured in worship at her feet. Oh, but it must be a grand ceremony of worship such as the country has never beheld before. It must be a landmark in our history. It shall be my supreme legacy to the Nation. Ignorant men worship gods. I, Sandip, shall create them.

But all this is a far cry. What about the urgent immediate? At least three thousand is indispensably necessary five thousand would do roundly and nicely. But how on earth am I to mention money after the high flight we have just taken? And yet time is precious!

I crushed all hesitation under foot as I jumped up and made my plunge: "Queen! Our purse is empty, our work about to stop!"

Bimala winced. I could see she was thinking of that impossible fifty thousand rupees. What a load she must have been carrying within her bosom, struggling under it, perhaps, through sleepless nights! What else had she with which to express her loving worship? Debarred from offering her heart at my feet, she hankers to make this sum of money, so hopelessly large for her, the bearer of her imprisoned feelings. The thought of what she must have gone through gives me a twinge of pain; for she is now wholly mine. The wrench of plucking up the plant by the roots is over. It is now only careful tending and nurture that is needed.

"Queen!" said I, "that fifty thousand rupees is not particularly wanted just now. I calculate that, for the present, five thousand or even three will serve."

The relief made her heart rebound. "I shall fetch you five thousand," she said in tones which seemed like an outburst of song the song which Radhika of the Vaishnava lyrics sang:

> For my lover will I bind in my hair
> The flower which has no equal in the three worlds!

it is the same tune, the same song: five thousand will I bring! That flower will I bind in my hair!

The narrow restraint of the flute brings out this quality of song. I must not allow the pressure of too much greed to flatten out the reed, for then, as I fear, music will give place to the questions "Why?" "What is the use of so much?" "How am I to get it?" not a word of which will rhyme with what Radhika sang! So, as I was saying, illusion alone is real it is the flute itself; while truth is but its empty hollow. Nikhil has of late got a taste of that pure emptiness one can see it in his face, which pains even me. But it was Nikhil's boast that he wanted the Truth, while mine was that I would never let go illusion from my grasp. Each has been suited to his taste, so why complain?

To keep Bimala's heart in the rarefied air of idealism, I cut short all further discussion over the five thousand rupees. I reverted to the demon−destroying goddess and her worship. When was the ceremony to be held and where? There is a great annual fair at Ruimari, within Nikhil's estates, where hundreds of thousands of pilgrims assemble. That would be a grand place to inaugurate the worship of our goddess!

Bimala waxed intensely enthusiastic. This was not the burning of foreign cloth or the people's granaries, so even Nikhil could have no objection so thought she. But I smiled inwardly. How little these two persons, who have been together, day and night, for nine whole years, know of each other! They know something perhaps of their home life, but when it comes to outside concerns they are entirely at sea. They had cherished the belief that the harmony of the home with the outside was perfect. Today they realize to their cost that it is too late to repair their neglect of years, and seek to harmonize them now.

What does it matter? Let those who have made the mistake learn their error by knocking against the world. Why need I bother about their plight? For the present I find it wearisome to keep Bimala soaring much longer, like a captive balloon, in regions ethereal. I had better get quite through with the matter in hand.

When Bimala rose to depart and had neared the door I remarked in my most casual manner: "So, about the money . . ."

Bimala halted and faced back as she said: "On the expiry of the month, when our personal allowances become due . . ."

"That, I am afraid, would be much too late."

"When do you want it then?"

"Tomorrow.

"Tomorrow you shall have it."

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20. A line from Bankim Chatterjee's national song *Bande Mataram*.

21. A quotation from the Upanishads.

22. There is a world of sentiment attached to the ornaments worn by women in Bengal.

They are not merely indicative of the love and regard of the giver, but the wearing of them symbolizes all that is held best in wifehood the constant solicitude for her husband's welfare, the successful performance of the material and spiritual duties of the household entrusted to her care. When the husband dies, and the responsibility for the household changes hands, then are all ornaments cast aside as a sign of the widow's renunciation of worldly concerns. At any other time the giving up of omaments is always a sign of supreme distress and as such appeals acutely to the sense of chivalry of any Bengali who may happen to witness it [Trans.].

Chapter Eight

Nikhil's Story

X

PARAGRAPHS and letters against me have begun to come out in the local papers; cartoons and lampoons are to follow, I am told. Jets of wit and humour are being splashed about, and the lies thus scattered are convulsing the whole country. They know that the monopoly of mud−throwing is theirs, and the innocent passer−by cannot escape unsoiled.

They are saying that the residents in my estates, from the highest to the lowest, are in favour of *Swadeshi*, but they dare not declare themselves, for fear of me. The few who have been brave enough to defy me have felt the full rigour of my persecution. I am in secret league with the police, and in private communication with the magistrate, and these frantic efforts of mine to add a foreign title of my own earning to the one I have inherited, will not, it is opined, go in vain.

On the other hand, the papers are full of praise for those devoted sons of the motherland, the Kundu and the Chakravarti *zamindar*s. If only, say they, the country had a few more of such staunch patriots, the mills of Manchester would have, had to sound their own dirge to the tune of *Bande Mataram*.

Then comes a letter in blood−red ink, giving a list of the traitorous *zamindar*s whose treasuries have been burnt down because of their failing to support the Cause. Holy Fire, it goes on to say, has been aroused to its

sacred function of purifying the country; and other agencies are also at work to see that those who are not true sons of the motherland do cease to encumber her lap. The signature is an obvious *nom−de−plume.*

I could see that this was the doing of our local students. So I sent for some of them and showed them the letter.

The B.A. student gravely informed me that they also had heard that a band of desperate patriots had been formed who would stick at nothing in order to clear away all obstacles to the success of *Swadeshi*.

"If," said I, "even one of our countrymen succumbs to these overbearing desperadoes, that will indeed be a defeat for the country!"

"We fail to follow you, Maharaja," said the history student. "'Our country," I tried to explain, "has been brought to death's door through sheer fear from fear of the gods down to fear of the police; and if you set up, in the name of freedom, the fear of some other bogey, whatever it may be called; if you would raise your victorious standard on the cowardice of the country by means of downright oppression, then no true lover of the country can bow to your decision."

"Is there any country, sir," pursued the history student, "where submission to Government is not due to fear?"

"The freedom that exists in any country," I replied, "may be measured by the extent of this reign of fear. Where its threat is confined to those who would hurt or plunder, there the Government may claim to have freed man from the violence of man. But if fear is to regulate how people are to dress, where they shall trade, or what they must eat, then is man's freedom of will utterly ignored, and manhood destroyed at the root."

"Is not such coercion of the individual will seen in other countries too?" continued the history student.

"Who denies it?" I exclaimed. "But in every country man has destroyed himself to the extent that he has permitted slavery to flourish."

"Does it not rather show," interposed a Master of Arts, "that trading in slavery is inherent in man a fundamental fact of his nature?"

"Sandip Babu made the whole thing clear," said a graduate. "He gave us the example of Harish Kundu, your neighbouring *zamindar*. From his estates you cannot ferret out a single ounce of foreign salt. Why? Because he has always ruled with an iron hand. In the case of those who are slaves by nature, the lack of a strong master is the greatest of all calamities."

"Why, sir!" chimed in an undergraduate, "have you not heard of the obstreperous tenant of Chakravarti, the other *zamindar* close by how the law was set on him till he was reduced to utter destitution? When at last he was left with nothing to eat, he started out to sell his wife's silver ornaments, but no one dared buy them. Then Chakravarti's manager offered him five rupees for the lot. They were worth over thirty, but he had to accept or starve. After taking over the bundle from him the manager coolly said that those five rupees would be credited towards his rent! We felt like having nothing more to do with Chakravarti or his manager after that, but Sandip Babu told us that if we threw over all the live people, we should have only dead bodies from the burning−grounds to carry on the work with! These live men, he pointed out, know what they want and how to get it they are born rulers. Those who do not know how to desire for themselves, must live in accordance with, or die by virtue of, the desires of such as these. Sandip Babu contrasted them Kundu and Chakravarti with you, Maharaja. You, he said, for all your good intentions, will never succeed in planting *Swadeshi* within your territory."

"It is my desire," I said, "to plant something greater than *Swadeshi*. I am not after dead logs but living trees and these will take time to grow."

"I am afraid, sir," sneered the history student, "that you will get neither log nor tree. Sandip Babu rightly teaches that in order to get, you must snatch. This is taking all of us some time to learn, because it runs counter to what we were taught at school. I have seen with my own eyes that when a rent−collector of Harish Kundu's found one of the tenants with nothing which could be sold up to pay his rent, he was made to sell his young wife! Buyers were not wanting, and the *zamindar*'s demand was satisfied. I tell you, sir, the sight of that man's distress prevented my getting sleep for nights together! But, feel it as I did, this much I realized, that the man who knows how to get the money he is out for, even by selling up his debtor's wife, is a better man than I am. I confess it is beyond me I am a weakling, my eyes fill with tears. If anybody can save our country it is these Kundus and these Chakravartis and their officials!"

I was shocked beyond words. "If what you say be true," I cried, "I clearly see that it must be the one endeavour of my life to save the country from these same Kundus and Chakravartis and officials. The slavery that has entered into our very bones is breaking out, at this opportunity, as ghastly tyranny. You have been so used to submit to domination through fear, you have come to believe that to make others submit is a kind of religion. My fight shall be against this weakness, this atrocious cruelty!" These things, which are so simple to ordinary folk, get so twisted in the minds of our B.A.'s and M.A.'s, the only purpose of whose historical quibbles seems to be to torture the truth!

XI

I am worried over Panchu's sham aunt. It will be difficult to disprove her, for though witnesses of a real event may be few or even wanting, innumerable proofs of a thing that has not happened can always be marshalled. The object of this move is, evidently, to get the sale of Panchu's holding to me set aside. Being unable to find any other way out of it, I was thinking of allowing Panchu to hold a permanent tenure in my estates and building him a cottage on it. But my master would not have it. I should not give in to these nefarious tactics so easily, he objected, and offered to attend to the matter himself.

"You, sir!" I cried, considerably surprised.

"Yes, I," he repeated.

I could not see, at all clearly, what my master could do to counteract these legal machinations. That evening, at the time he usually came to me, he did not turn up. On my making inquiries, his servant said he had left home with a few things packed in a small trunk, and some bedding, saying he would be back in a few days. I thought he might have sallied forth to hunt for witnesses in Panchu's uncle's village. In that case, however, I was. sure that his would be a hopeless quest . . .

During the day I forget myself in my work. As the late autumn afternoon wears on, the colours of the sky become turbid, and so do the feelings of my mind. There are many in this world whose minds dwell in brick−built houses they can afford to ignore the thing called the outside. But my mind lives under the trees in the open, directly receives upon itself the messages borne by the free winds, and responds from the bottom of its heart to all the musical cadences of light and darkness.

While the day is bright and the world in the pursuit of its numberless tasks crowds around, then it seems as if my life wants nothing else. But when the colours of the sky fade away and the blinds are drawn down over the windows of heaven, then my heart tells me that evening falls just for the purpose of shutting out the world, to mark the time when the darkness must be filled with the One. This is the end to which earth, sky, and waters conspire, and I cannot harden myself against accepting its meaning. So when the gloaming

deepens over the world, like the gaze of the dark eyes of the beloved, then my whole being tells me that work alone cannot be the truth of life, that work is not the be−all and the end−all of man, for man is not simply a serf even though the serfdom be of the True and the Good.

Alas, Nikhil, have you for ever parted company with that self of yours who used to be set free under the starlight, to plunge into the infinite depths of the night's darkness after the day's work was done? How terribly alone is he, who misses companionship in the midst of the multitudinousness of life.

The other day, when the afternoon had reached the meeting−point of day and night, I had no work, nor the mind for work, nor was my master there to keep me company. With my empty, drifting heart longing to anchor on to something, I traced my steps towards the inner gardens. I was very fond of chrysanthemums and had rows of them, of all varieties, banked up in pots against one of the garden walls. When they were in flower, it looked like a wave of green breaking into iridescent foam. It was some time since I had been to this part of the grounds, and I was beguiled into a cheerful expectancy at the thought of meeting my chrysanthemums after our long separation.

As I went in, the full moon had just peeped over the wall, her slanting rays leaving its foot in deep shadow. It seemed as if she had come a−tiptoe from behind, and clasped the darkness over the eyes, smiling mischievously. When I came near the bank of chrysanthemums, I saw a figure stretched on the grass in front. My heart gave a sudden thud. The figure also sat up with a start at my footsteps.

What was to be done next? I was wondering whether it would do to beat a precipitate retreat. Bimala, also, was doubtless casting about for some way of escape. But it was as awkward to go as to stay! Before I could make up my mind, Bimala rose, pulled the end of her *sari* over her head, and walked off towards the inner apartments.

This brief pause had been enough to make real to me the cruel load of Bimala's misery. The plaint of my own life vanished from me in a moment. I called out: "Bimala!"

She started and stayed her steps, but did not turn back. I went round and stood before her. Her face was in the shade, the moonlight fell on mine. Her eyes were downcast, her hands clenched.

"Bimala," said I, "why should I seek to keep you fast in this closed cage of mine? Do I not know that thus you cannot but pine and droop?"

She stood still, without raising her eyes or uttering a word.

"I know," I continued, "that if I insist on keeping you shackled my whole life will be reduced to nothing but an iron chain. What pleasure can that be to me?"

She was still silent.

"So," I concluded, "I tell you, truly, Bimala, you are free. Whatever I may or may not have been to you, I refuse to be your fetters." With which I came away towards the outer apartments.

No, no, it was not a generous impulse, nor indifference. I had simply come to understand that never would I be free until I could set free. To try to keep Bimala as a garland round my neck, would have meant keeping a weight hanging over my heart. Have I not been praying with all my strength, that if happiness may not be mine, let it go; if grief needs must be my lot, let it come; but let me not be kept in bondage. To clutch hold of that which is untrue as though it were true, is only to throttle oneself. May I be saved from such self−destruction.

When I entered my room, I found my master waiting there. My agitated feelings were still heaving within me. "Freedom, sir," I began unceremoniously, without greeting or inquiry, "freedom is the biggest thing for man. Nothing can be compared to it nothing at all!"

Surprised at my outburst, my master looked up at me in silence.

"One can understand nothing from books," I went on. "We read in the scriptures that our desires are bonds, fettering us as well as others. But such words, by themselves, are so empty. It is only when we get to the point of letting the bird out of its cage that we can realize how free the bird has set us. Whatever we cage, shackles us with desire whose bonds are stronger than those of iron chains. I tell you, sir, this is just what the world has failed to understand. They all seek to reform something outside themselves. But reform is wanted only in one's own desires, nowhere else, nowhere else!"

"We think," he said, "that we are our own masters when we get in our hands the object of our desire but we are really our own masters only when we are able to cast out our desires from our minds."

"When we put all this into words, sir," I went on, "it sounds like some bald−headed injunction, but when we realize even a little of it we find it to be *amrita* which the gods have drunk and become immortal. We cannot see Beauty till we let go our hold of it. It was Buddha who conquered the world, not Alexander this is untrue when stated in dry prose oh when shall we be able to sing it? When shall all these most intimate truths of the universe overflow the pages of printed books and leap out in a sacred stream like the Ganges from the Gangotrie?"

I was suddenly reminded of my master's absence during the last few days and of my ignorance as to its reason. I felt somewhat foolish as I asked him: "And where have you been all this while, sir?"

"Staying with Panchu," he replied.

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "Have you been there all these days?"

"Yes. I wanted to come to an understanding with the woman who calls herself his aunt. She could hardly be induced to believe that there could be such an odd character among the gentlefolk as the one who sought their hospitality. When she found I really meant to stay on, she began to feel rather ashamed of herself. 'Mother,' said I, 'you are not going to get rid of me, even if you abuse me! And so long as I stay, Panchu stays also. For you see, do you not, that I cannot stand by and see his motherless little ones sent out into the streets?'

"She listened to my talks in this strain for a couple of days without saying yes or no. This morning I found her tying up her bundles. 'We are going back to Brindaban,' she said. 'Let us have our expenses for the journey.' I knew she was not going to Brindaban, and also that the cost of her journey would be substantial. So I have come to you."

"The required cost shall be paid," I said.

"The old woman is not a bad sort," my master went on musingly. "Panchu was not sure of her caste, and would not let her touch the water−jar, or anything at all of his. So they were continually bickering. When she found I had no objection to her touch, she looked after me devotedly. She is a splendid cook!

"But all remnants of Panchu's respect for me vanished! To the last he had thought that I was at least a simple sort of person. But here was I, risking my caste without a qualm to win over the old woman for my purpose. Had I tried to steal a march on her by tutoring a witness for the trial, that would have been a different matter. Tactics must be met by tactics. But stratagem at the expense of orthodoxy is more than he can tolerate!

"Anyhow, I must stay on a few days at Panchu's even after the woman leaves, for Harish Kundu may be up to any kind of devilry. He has been telling his satellites that he was content to have furnished Panchu with an aunt, but I have gone the length of supplying him with a father. He would like to see, now, how many fathers of his can save him!"

"We may or may not be able to save him," I said; "but if we should perish in the attempt to save the country from the thousand−and−one snares of religion, custom and selfishness which these people are busy spreading, we shall at least die happy."

Bimala's Story

XIV

Who could have thought that so much would happen in this one life? I feel as if I have passed through a whole series of births, time has been flying so fast, I did not feel it move at all, till the shock came the other day.

I knew there would be words between us when I made up my mind to ask my husband to banish foreign goods from our market. But it was my firm belief that I had no need to meet argument by argument, for there was magic in the very air about me. Had not so tremendous a man as Sandip fallen helplessly at my feet, like a wave of the mighty sea breaking on the shore? Had I called him? No, it was the summons of that magic spell of mine. And Amulya, poor dear boy, when he first came to me how the current of his life flushed with colour, like the river at dawn! Truly have I realized how a goddess feels when she looks upon the radiant face of her devotee.

With the confidence begotten of these proofs of my power, I was ready to meet my husband like a lightning−charged cloud. But what was it that happened? Never in all these nine years have I seen such a far−away, distraught look in his eyes like the desert sky with no merciful moisture of its own, no colour reflected, even, from what it looked upon. I should have been so relieved if his anger had flashed out! But I could find nothing in him which I could touch. I felt as unreal as a dream a dream which would leave only the blackness of night when it was over.

In the old days I used to be jealous of my sister−in−law for her beauty. Then I used to feel that Providence had given me no power of my own, that my whole strength lay in the love which my husband had bestowed on me. Now that I had drained to the dregs the cup of power and could not do without its intoxication, I suddenly found it dashed to pieces at my feet, leaving me nothing to live for.

How feverishly I had sat to do my hair that day. Oh, shame, shame on me, the utter shame of it! My sister−in−law, when passing by, had exclaimed: "Aha, Chota Rani! Your hair seems ready to jump off. Don't let it carry your head with it."

And then, the other day in the garden, how easy my husband found it to tell me that he set me free! But can freedom empty freedom be given and taken so easily as all that? It is like setting a fish free in the sky for how can I move or live outside the atmosphere of loving care which has always sustained me?

When I came to my room today, I saw only furniture only the bedstead, only the looking−glass, only the clothes−rack not the all−pervading heart which used to be there, over all. Instead of it there was freedom, only freedom, mere emptiness! A dried−up watercourse with all its rocks and pebbles laid bare. No feeling, only furniture!

When I had arrived at a state of utter bewilderment, wondering whether anything true was left in my life, and whereabouts it could be, I happened to meet Sandip again. Then life struck against life, and the sparks flew in the same old way. Here was truth impetuous truth which rushed in and overflowed all bounds, truth which was a thousand times truer than the Bara Rani with her maid, Thako and her silly songs, and all the rest of them who talked and laughed and wandered about . . .

"Fifty thousand!" Sandip had demanded.

"What is fifty thousand?" cried my intoxicated heart. "You shall have it!"

How to get it, where to get it, were minor points not worth troubling over. Look at me. Had I not risen, all in one moment, from my nothingness to a height above everything? So shall all things come at my beck and call. I shall get it, get it, get it there cannot be any doubt.

Thus had I come away from Sandip the other day. Then as I looked about me, where was it the tree of plenty? Oh, why does this outer world insult the heart so?

And yet get it I must; how, I do not care; for sin there cannot be. Sin taints only the weak; I with my *Shakti* am beyond its reach. Only a commoner can be a thief, the king conquers and takes his rightful spoil . . . I must find out where the treasury is; who takes the money in; who guards it.

I spent half the night standing in the outer verandah peering at the row of office buildings. But how to get that fifty thousand rupees out of the clutches of those iron bars? If by some *mantram* I could have made all those guards fall dead in their places, I would not have hesitated so pitiless did I feel!

But while a whole gang of robbers seemed dancing a war−dance within the whirling brain of its Rani, the great house of the Rajas slept in peace. The gong of the watch sounded hour after hour, and the sky overhead placidly looked on.

At last I sent for Amulya.

"Money is wanted for the Cause," I told him. "Can you not get it out of the treasury?"

"Why not?" said he, with his chest thrown out.

Alas! had I not said "Why not?" to Sandip just in the same way? The poor lad's confidence could rouse no hopes in my mind.

"How will you do it?" I asked.

The wild plans he began to unfold would hardly bear repetition outside the pages of a penny dreadful.

"No, Amulya," I said severely, "you must not be childish."

"Very well, then," he said, "let me bribe those watchmen."

"Where is the money to come from?"

"I can loot the bazar," he burst out, without blenching.

"Leave all that alone. I have my ornaments, they will serve.

"But," said Amulya, "it strikes me that the cashier cannot be bribed. Never mind, there is another and simpler way."

"What is that?"

"Why need you hear it? It is quite simple."

"Still, I should like to know."

Amulya fumbled in the pocket of his tunic and pulled out, first a small edition of the *Gita*, which he placed on the table and then a little pistol, which he showed me, but said nothing further.

Horror! It did not take him a moment to make up his mind to kill our good old cashier! [23] To look at his frank, open face one would not have thought him capable of hurting a fly, but how different were the words which came from his mouth. It was clear that the cashier's place in the world meant nothing real to him; it was a mere vacancy, lifeless, feelingless, with only stock phrases from the *Gita Who kills the body kills naught!*

"Whatever do you mean, Amulya?" I exclaimed at length. "Don't you know that the dear old man has got a wife and children and that he is . . ."

"Where are we to find men who have no wives and children?" he interrupted. "Look here, Maharani, the thing we call pity is, at bottom, only pity for ourselves. We cannot bear to wound our own tender instincts, and so we do not strike at all pity indeed! The height of cowardice!"

To hear Sandip's phrases in the mouth of this mere boy staggered me. So delightfully, lovably immature was he of that age when the good may still be believed in as good, of that age when one really lives and grows. The Mother in me awoke.

For myself there was no longer good or bad only death, beautiful alluring death. But to hear this stripling calmly talk of murdering an inoffensive old man as the right thing to do, made me shudder all over. The more clearly I saw that there was no sin in his heart, the more horrible appeared to me the sin of his words. I seemed to see the sin of the parents visited on the innocent child.

The sight of his great big eyes shining with faith and enthusiasm touched me to the quick. He was going, in his fascination, straight to the jaws of the python, from which, once in, there was no return. How was he to be saved? Why does not my country become, for once, a real Mother clasp him to her bosom and cry out: "Oh, my child, my child, what profits it that you should save me, if so it be that I should fail to save you?"

I know, I know, that all Power on earth waxes great under compact with Satan. But the Mother is there, alone though she be, to contemn and stand against this devil's progress. The Mother cares not for mere success, however great she wants to give life, to save life. My very soul, today, stretches out its hands in yearning to save this child.

A while ago I suggested robbery to him. Whatever I may now say against it will be put down to a woman's weakness. They only love our weakness when it drags the world in its toils!

"You need do nothing at all, Amulya, I will see to the money," I told him finally. When he had almost reached the door, I called him back.

"Amulya," said I, "I am your elder sister. Today is not the Brothers' Day [24] according to the calendar, but

all the days in the year are really Brothers' Days. My blessing be with you: may God keep you always."

These unexpected words from my lips took Amulya by surprise. He stood stock−still for a time. Then, coming to himself, he prostrated himself at my feet in acceptance of the relationship and did me reverence. When he rose his eyes were full of tears . . . O little brother mine! I am fast going to my death let me take all your sin away with me. May no taint from me ever tarnish your innocence!

I said to him: "Let your offering of reverence be that pistol!"

"What do you want with it, sister?"

"I will practise death."

"Right, sister. Our women, also, must know how to die, to deal death!" with which Amulya handed me the pistol. The radiance of his youthful countenance seemed to tinge my life with the touch of a new dawn. I put away the pistol within my clothes. May this reverence−offering be the last resource in my extremity . . .

The door to the mother's chamber in my woman's heart once opened, I thought it would always remain open. But this pathway to the supreme good was closed when the mistress took the place of the mother and locked it again. The very next day I saw Sandip; and madness, naked and rampant, danced upon my heart.

What was this? Was this, then, my truer self? Never! I had never before known this shameless, this cruel one within me. The snake−charmer had come, pretending to draw this snake from within the fold of my garment but it was never there, it was his all the time. Some demon has gained possession of me, and what I am doing today is the play of his activity it has nothing to do with me.

This demon, in the guise of a god, had come with his ruddy torch to call me that day, saying: "I am your Country. I am your Sandip. I am more to you than anything else of yours. *Bande Mataram*!" And with folded hands I had responded: "You are my religion. You are my heaven. Whatever else is mine shall be swept away before my love for you. *Bande Mataram*!"

Five thousand is it? Five thousand it shall be! You want it tomorrow? Tomorrow you shall have it! In this desperate orgy, that gift of five thousand shall be as the foam of wine and then for the riotous revel! The immovable world shall sway under our feet, fire shall flash from our eyes, a storm shall roar in our ears, what is or is not in front shall become equally dim. And then with tottering footsteps we shall plunge to our death in a moment all fire will be extinguished, the ashes will be scattered, and nothing will remain behind.

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23. The cashier is the official who is most in touch with the ladies of a *zamindar* 's household, directly taking their requisitions for household stores and doing their shopping for them, and so he becomes more a member of the family than the others. [Trans.].

24. The daughter of the house occupies a place of specially tender affection in a Bengali household (perhaps in Hindu households all over India) because, by dictate of custom, she must be given away in marriage so early. She thus takes corresponding memories with her to her husband's home, where she has to begin as a stranger before she can get into her place. The resulting feeling, of the mistress of her new home for the one she has left, has taken ceremonial form as the Brothers' Day, on which the brothers are invited to the married sisters' houses. Where the sister is the elder, she offers her blessing and receives the brother's reverence, and vice versa. Presents, called the offerings of reverence (or blessing), are exchanged. [Trans.].

Chapter Nine. Bimala's Story

XV

FOR a time I was utterly at a loss to think of any way of getting that money. Then, the other day, in the light of intense excitement, suddenly the whole picture stood out clear before me.

Every year my husband makes a reverence−offering of six thousand rupees to my sister−in−law at the time of the Durga Puja. Every year it is deposited in her account at the bank in Calcutta. This year the offering was made as usual, but it has not yet been sent to the bank, being kept meanwhile in an iron safe, in a corner of the little dressing−room attached to our bedroom.

Every year my husband takes the money to the bank himself. This year he has not yet had an opportunity of going to town. How could I fail to see the hand of Providence in this? The money has been held up because the country wants it who could have the power to take it away from her to the bank? And how can I have the power to refuse to take the money? The goddess revelling in destruction holds out her blood−cup crying: "Give me drink. I am thirsty." I will give her my own heart's blood with that five thousand rupees. Mother, the loser of that money will scarcely feel the loss, but me you will utterly ruin!

Many a time, in the old days, have I inwardly called the Senior Rani a thief, for I charged her with wheedling money out of my trusting husband. After her husband's death, she often used to make away with things belonging to the estate for her own use. This I used to point out to my husband, but he remained silent. I would get angry and say: "If you feel generous, make gifts by all means, but why allow yourself to be robbed?" Providence must have smiled, then, at these complaints of mine, for tonight I am on the way to rob my husband's safe of my sister−in−law's money. My husband's custom was to let his keys remain in his pockets when he took off his clothes for the night, leaving them in the dressing−room. I picked out the key of the safe and opened it. The slight sound it made seemed to wake the whole world! A sudden chill turned my hands and feet icy cold, and I shivered all over.

There was a drawer inside the safe. On opening this I found the money, not in currency notes, but in gold rolled up in paper. I had no time to count out what I wanted. There were twenty rolls, all of which I took and tied up in a corner of my *sari*.

What a weight it was. The burden of the theft crushed my heart to the dust. Perhaps notes would have made it seem less like thieving, but this was all gold.

After I had stolen into my room like a thief, it felt like my own room no longer. All the most precious rights which I had over it vanished at the touch of my theft. I began to mutter to myself, as though telling *mantrams: Bande Mataram, Bande Mataram* , my Country, my golden Country, all this gold is for you, for none else!

But in the night the mind is weak. I came back into the bedroom where my husband was asleep, closing my eyes as I passed through, and went off to the open terrace beyond, on which I lay prone, clasping to my breast the end of the *sari* tied over the gold. And each one of the rolls gave me a shock of pain.

The silent night stood there with forefinger upraised. I could not think of my house as separate from my country: I had robbed my house, I had robbed my country. For this sin my house had ceased to be mine, my country also was estranged from me. Had I died begging for my country, even unsuccessfully, that would have been worship, acceptable to the gods. But theft is never worship how then can I offer this gold? Ah me! I am doomed to death myself, must I desecrate my country with my impious touch? The way to put the

money back is closed to me. I have not

the strength to return to the room, take again that key, open once more that safe I should swoon on the threshold of my husband's door. The only road left now is the road in front. Neither have I the strength deliberately to sit down and count the coins. Let them remain behind their coverings: I cannot calculate.

There was no mist in the winter sky. The stars were shining brightly. If, thought I to myself, as I lay out there, I had to steal these stars one by one, like golden coins, for my country these stars so carefully stored up in the bosom of the darkness then the sky would be blinded, the night widowed for ever, and my theft would rob the whole world. But was not also this very thing I had done a robbing of the whole world not only of money, but of trust, of righteousness?

I spent the night lying on the terrace. When at last it was morning, and I was sure that my husband had risen and left the room, then only with my shawl pulled over my head, could I retrace my steps towards the bedroom.

My sister−in−law was about, with her brass pot, watering her plants. When she saw me passing in the distance she cried: "Have you heard the news, Chota Rani?"

I stopped in silence, all in a tremor. It seemed to me that the rolls of sovereigns were bulging through the shawl. I feared they would burst and scatter in a ringing shower, exposing to all the servants of the house the thief who had made herself destitute by robbing her own wealth.

"Your band of robbers," she went on, "have sent an anonymous message threatening to loot the treasury."

I remained as silent as a thief.

"I was advising Brother Nikhil to seek your protection," she continued banteringly. "Call off your minions, Robber Queen! We will offer sacrifices to your *Bande Mataram* if you will but save us. What doings there are these days! but for the Lord's sake, spare our house at least from burglary."

I hastened into my room without reply. I had put my foot on quicksand, and could not now withdraw it. Struggling would only send me down deeper.

If only the time would arrive when I could hand over the money to Sandip! I could bear it no longer, its weight was breaking through my very ribs.

It was still early when I got word that Sandip was awaiting me. Today I had no thought of adornment. Wrapped as I was in my shawl, I went off to the outer apartments. As I entered the sitting−room I saw Sandip and Amulya there, together. All my dignity, all my honour, seemed to run tingling through my body from head to foot and vanish into the ground. I should have to lay bare a woman's uttermost shame in sight of this boy! Could they have been discussing my deed in their meeting place? Had any vestige of a veil of decency been left for me?

We women shall never understand men. When they are bent on making a road for some achievement, they think nothing of breaking the heart of the world into pieces to pave it for the progress of their chariot. When they are mad with the intoxication of creating, they rejoice in destroying the creation of the Creator. This heart−breaking shame of mine will not attract even a glance from their eyes. They have no feeling for life itself all their eagerness is for their object. What am I to them but a meadow flower in the path of a torrent in flood?

What good will this extinction of me be to Sandip? Only five thousand rupees? Was not I good for something more than only five thousand rupees? Yes, indeed! Did I not learn that from Sandip himself, and was I not able in the light of this knowledge to despise all else in my world? I was the giver of light, of life, of *Shakti* , of immortality in that belief, in that joy, I had burst all my bounds and come into the open. Had anyone then fulfilled for me that joy, I should have lived in my death. I should have lost nothing in the loss of my all.

Do they want to tell me now that all this was false? The psalm of my praise which was sung so devotedly, did it bring me down from my heaven, not to make heaven of earth, but only to level heaven itself with the dust?

XVI

"The money, Queen?" said Sandip with his keen glance full on my face.

Amulya also fixed his gaze on me. Though not my own mother's child, yet the dear lad is brother to me; for mother is mother all the world over. With his guileless face, his gentle eyes, his innocent youth, he looked at me. And I, a woman of his mother's sex how could I hand him poison, just because he asked for it?

"The money, Queen!" Sandip's insolent demand rang in my ears. For very shame and vexation I felt I wanted to fling that gold at Sandip's head. I could hardly undo the knot of my *sari*, my fingers trembled so. At last the paper rolls dropped on the table.

Sandip's face grew black . . . He must have thought that the rolls were of silver . . . What contempt was in his looks. What utter disgust at incapacity. It was almost as if he could have struck me! He must have suspected that I had come to parley with him, to offer to compound his claim for five thousand rupees with a few hundreds. There was a moment when I thought he would snatch up the rolls and throw them out of the window, declaring that he was no beggar, but a king claiming tribute.

"Is that all?" asked Amulya with such pity welling up in his voice that I wanted to sob out aloud. I kept my heart tightly pressed down, and merely nodded my head. Sandip was speechless. He neither touched the rolls, nor uttered a sound.

My humiliation went straight to the boy's heart. With a sudden, feigned enthusiasm he exclaimed: "It's plenty. It will do splendidly. You have saved us." With which he tore open the covering of one of the rolls.

The sovereigns shone out. And in a moment the black covering seemed to be lifted from Sandip's countenance also. His delight beamed forth from his features. Unable to control his sudden revulsion of feeling, he sprang up from his seat towards me. What he intended I know not. I flashed a lightning glance towards Amulya the colour had left the boy's face as at the stroke of a whip. Then with all my strength I thrust Sandip from me. As he reeled back his head struck the edge of the marble table and he dropped on the floor. There he lay awhile, motionless. Exhausted with my effort, I sank back on my seat.

Amulya's face lightened with a joyful radiance. He did not even turn towards Sandip, but came straight up, took the dust of my feet, and then remained there, sitting on the floor in front of me. O my little brother, my child! This reverence of yours is the last touch of heaven left in my empty world! I could contain myself no longer, and my tears flowed fast. I covered my eyes with the end of my *sari*, which I pressed to my face with both my hands, and sobbed and sobbed. And every time that I felt on my feet his tender touch trying to comfort me my tears broke out afresh.

After a little, when I had recovered myself and taken my hands from my face, I saw Sandip back at the table, gathering up the sovereigns in his handkerchief, as if nothing had happened. Amulya rose to his seat, from his place near my feet, his wet eyes shining.

Sandip coolly looked up at my face as he remarked: "It is six thousand."

"What do we want with so much, Sandip Babu?" cried Amulya. "Three thousand five hundred is all we need for our work."

"Our wants are not for this one place only," Sandip replied. "We shall want all we can get."

"That may be," said Amulya. "But in future I undertake to get you all you want. Out of this, Sandip Babu, please return the extra two thousand five hundred to the Maharani."

Sandip glanced enquiringly at me.

"No, no," I exclaimed. "I shall never touch that money again. Do with it as you will."

"Can man ever give as woman can?" said Sandip, looking towards Amulya.

"They are goddesses!" agreed Amulya with enthusiasm.

"We men can at best give of our power," continued Sandip. "But women give themselves. Out of their own life they give birth, out of their own life they give sustenance. Such gifts are the only true gifts." Then turning to me, "Queen!" said he, "if what you have given us had been only money I would not have touched it. But you have given that which is more to you than life itself!"

There must be two different persons inside men. One of these in me can understand that Sandip is trying to delude me; the other is content to be deluded. Sandip has power, but no strength of righteousness. The weapon of his which rouses up life smites it again to death. He has the unfailing quiver of the gods, but the shafts in them are of the demons.

Sandip's handkerchief was not large enough to hold all the coins. "Queen," he asked, "can you give me another?" When I gave him mine, he reverently touched his forehead with it, and then suddenly kneeling on the floor he made me an obeisance. "Goddess!" he said, "it was to offer my reverence that I had approached you, but you repulsed me, and roIled me in the dust. Be it so, I accept your repulse as your boon to me, I raise it to my head in salutation!" with which he pointed to the place where he had been hurt.

Had I then misunderstood him? Could it be that his outstretched hands had really been directed towards my feet? Yet, surely, even Amulya had seen the passion that flamed out of his eyes, his face. But Sandip is such an adept in setting music to his chant of praise that I cannot argue; I lose my power of seeing truth; my sight is clouded over like an opium−eater's eyes. And so, after all, he gave me back twice as much in return for the blow I had dealt him the wound on his head ended by making me bleed at heart. When I had received Sandip's obeisance my theft seemed to gain a dignity, and the gold glittering on the table to smile away all fear of disgrace, all stings of conscience.

Like me Amulya also was won back. His devotion to Sandip, which had suffered a momentary check, blazed up anew. The flower−vase of his mind filled once more with offerings for the worship of Sandip and me. His simple faith shone out of his eyes with the pure light of the morning star at dawn.

After I had offered worship and received worship my sin became radiant. And as Amulya looked on my face he raised his folded hands in salutation and cried *Bande Mataram*! I cannot expect to have this adoration surrounding me for ever; and yet this has come to be the only means of keeping alive my self−respect.

I can no longer enter my bedroom. The bedstead seems to thrust out a forbidding hand, the iron safe frowns at

me. I want to get away from this continual insult to myself which is rankling within me. I want to keep running to Sandip to hear him sing my praises. There is just this one little altar of worship which has kept its head above the all−pervading depths of my dishonour, and so I want to cleave to it night and day; for on whichever side I step away from it, there is only emptiness.

Praise, praise, I want unceasing praise. I cannot live if my wine−cup be left empty for a single moment. So, as the very price of my life, I want Sandip of all the world, today.

XVII

When my husband nowadays comes in for his meals I feel I cannot sit before him; and yet it is such a shame not to be near him that I feel I cannot do that either. So I seat myself where we cannot look at each other's face. That was how I was sitting the other day when the Bara Rani came and joined us.

"It is all very well for you, brother," said she, "to laugh away these threatening letters. But they do frighten me so. Have you sent off that money you gave me to the Calcutta bank?"

"No, I have not yet had the time to get it away," my husband replied.

"You are so careless, brother dear, you had better look out. . ."

"But it is in the iron safe right inside the inner dressing−room," said my husband with a reassuring smile.

"What if they get in there? You can never tell!"

"If they go so far, they might as well carry you off too!"

"Don't you fear, no one will come for poor me. The real attraction is in your room! But joking apart, don't run the risk of keeping money in the room like that."

"They will be taking along the Government revenue to Calcutta in a few days now; I will send this money to the bank under the same escort."

"Very well. But see you don't forget all about it, you are so absent−minded."

"Even if that money gets lost, while in my room, the loss cannot be yours, Sister Rani."

"Now, now, brother, you will make me very angry if you talk in that way. Was I making any difference between yours and mine? What if your money is lost, does not that hurt me? If Providence has thought fit to take away my all, it has not left me insensible to the value of the most devoted brother known since the days of Lakshman." [25]

"Well, Junior Rani, are you turned into a wooden doll? You have not spoken a word yet. Do you know, brother, our Junior Rani thinks I try to flatter you. If things came to that pass I should not hesitate to do so, but I know my dear old brother does not need it!"

Thus the Senior Rani chattered on, not forgetting now and then to draw her brother's attention to this or that special delicacy amongst the dishes that were being served. My head was all the time in a whirl. The crisis was fast coming. Something must be done about replacing that money. And as I kept asking myself what could be done, and how it was to be done, the unceasing patter of my sister−in−law's words seemed more and more intolerable.

What made it all the worse was, that nothing could escape my sister−in−law's keen eyes. Every now and then she was casting side glances towards me. What she could read in my face I do not know, but to me it seemed that everything was written there only too plainly.

Then I did an infinitely rash thing. Affecting an easy, amused laugh I said: "All the Senior Rani's suspicions, I see, are reserved for me her fears of thieves and robbers are only a feint."

The Senior Rani smiled mischievously. "You are right, sister mine. A woman's theft is the most fatal of all thefts. But how can you elude my watchfulness? Am I a man, that you should hoodwink me?"

"If you fear me so," I retorted, "let me keep in your hands all I have, as security. If I cause you loss, you can then repay yourself."

"Just listen to her, our simple little Junior Rani!" she laughed back, turning to my husband. "Does she not know that there are losses which no security can make good, either in this world or in the next?"

My husband did not join in our exchange of words. When he had finished, he went off to the outer apartments, for nowadays he does not take his mid−day rest in our room.

All my more valuable jewels were in deposit in the treasury in charge of the cashier. Still what I kept with me must have been worth thirty or forty thousand. I took my jewel−box to the Bara Rani's room and opened it out before her, saying: "I leave these with you, sister. They will keep you quite safe from all worry."

The Bara Rani made a gesture of mock despair. "You positively astound me, Chota Rani!" she said. "Do you really suppose I spend sleepless nights for fear of being robbed by you?"

"What harm if you did have a wholesome fear of me? Does anybody know anybody else in this world?"

"You want to teach me a lesson by trusting me? No, no! I am bothered enough to know what to do with my own jewels, without keeping watch over yours. Take them away, there's a dear, so many prying servants are about."

I went straight from my sister−in−law's room to the sitting−room outside, and sent for Amulya. With him Sandip came along too. I was in a great hurry, and said to Sandip: "If you don't mind, I want to have a word or two with Amulya. Would you. . ."

Sandip smiled a wry smile. "So Amulya and I are separate in your eyes? If you have set about to wean him from me, I must confess I have no power to retain him."

I made no reply, but stood waiting.

"Be it so," Sandip went on. "Finish your special talk with Amulya. But then you must give me a special talk all to myself too, or it will mean a defeat for me. I can stand everything, but not defeat. My share must always be the lion's share. This has been my constant quarrel with Providence. I will defeat the Dispenser of my fate, but not take defeat at his hands." With a crushing look at Amulya, Sandip walked out of the room.

"Amulya, my own little brother, you must do one thing for me," I said.

"I will stake my life for whatever duty you may lay on me, sister."

I brought out my jewel−box from the folds of my shawl and placed it before him. "Sell or pawn these," I said,

"and get me six thousand rupees as fast as ever you can."

"No, no, Sister Rani," said Amulya, touched to the quick. "Let these jewels be. I will get you six thousand all the same."

"Oh, don't be silly," I said impatiently. "There is no time for any nonsense. Take this box. Get away to Calcutta by the night train. And bring me the money by the day after tomorrow positively."

Amulya took a diamond necklace out of the box, held it up to the light and put it back gloomily.

"I know," I told him, "that you will never get the proper price for these diamonds, so I am giving you jewels worth about thirty thousand. I don't care if they all go, but I must have that six thousand without fail."

"Do you know, Sister Rani," said Amulya, "I have had a quarrel with Sandip Babu over that six thousand rupees he took from you? I cannot tell you how ashamed I felt. But Sandip Babu would have it that we must give up even our shame for the country. That may be so. But this is somehow different. I do not fear to die for the country, to kill for the country that much *Shakti* has been given me. But I cannot forget the shame of having taken money from you. There Sandip Babu is ahead of me. He has no regrets or compunctions. He says we must get rid of the idea that the money belongs to the one in whose box it happens to be if we cannot, where is the magic of *Bande Mataram* ?"

Amulya gathered enthusiasm as he talked on. He always warms up when he has me for a listener. "The Gita tells us," he continued, "that no one can kill the soul. Killing is a mere word. So also is the taking away of money. Whose is the money? No one has created it. No one can take it away with him when he departs this life, for it is no part of his soul. Today it is mine, tomorrow my son's, the next day his creditor's. Since, in fact, money belongs to no one, why should any blame attach to our patriots if, instead of leaving it for some worthless son, they take it for their own use?"

When I hear Sandip's words uttered by this boy, I tremble all over. Let those who are snake−charmers play with snakes; if harm comes to them, they are prepared for it. But these boys are so innocent, all the world is ready with its blessing to protect them. They play with a snake not knowing its nature, and when we see them smilingly, trustfully, putting their hands within reach of its fangs, then we understand how terribly dangerous the snake is. Sandip is right when he suspects that though I, for myself, may be ready to die at his hands, this boy I shall wean from him and save.

"So the money is wanted for the use of your patriots?" I questioned with a smile.

"Of course it is!" said Amulya proudly. "Are they not our kings? Poverty takes away from their regal power. Do you know, we always insist on Sandip Babu travelling First Class? He never shirks kingly honours he accepts them not for himself, but for the glory of us all. The greatest weapon of those who rule the world, Sandip Babu has told us, is the hypnotism of their display. To take the vow of poverty would be for them not merely a penance it would mean suicide."

At this point Sandip noiselessly entered the room. I threw my shawl over the jewel−case with a rapid movement.

"The special−talk business not yet over?" he asked with a sneer in his tone.

"Yes, we've quite finished," said Amulya apologetically. "It was nothing much."

"No, Amulya," I said, "we have not quite finished."

"So exit Sandip for the second time, I suppose?" said Sandip.

"If you please."

"And as to Sandip's re−entry .

"Not today. I have no time."

"I see!" said Sandip as his eyes flashed. "No time to waste, only for special talks!"

Jealousy! Where the strong man shows weakness, there the weaker sex cannot help beating her drums of victory. So I repeated firmly: "I really have no time."

Sandip went away looking black. Amulya was greatly perturbed. "Sister Rani," he pleaded, "Sandip Babu is annoyed."

"He has neither cause nor right to be annoyed," I said with some vehemence. "Let me caution you about one thing, Amulya. Say nothing to Sandip Babu about the sale of my jewels on your life."

"No, I will not."

"Then you had better not delay any more. You must get away by tonight's train."

Amulya and I left the room together. As we came out on the verandah Sandip was standing there. I could see he was waiting to waylay Amulya. To prevent that I had to engage him. "What is it you wanted to tell me, Sandip Babu?" I asked.

"I have nothing special to say mere small talk. And since you have not the time . . "

"I can give you just a little."

By this time Amulya had left. As we entered the room Sandip asked: "What was that box Amulya carried away?"

The box had not escaped his eyes. I remained firm. "If I could have told you, it would have been made over to him in your presence!"

"So you think Amulya will not tell me?"

"No, he will not."

Sandip could not conceal his anger any longer. You think you will gain the mastery over me?" he blazed out. "That shall never be. Amulya, there, would die a happy death if I deigned to trample him under foot. I will never, so long as I live, allow you to bring him to your feet!"

Oh, the weak! the weak! At last Sandip has realized that he is weak before me! That is why there is this sudden outburst of anger. He has understood that he cannot meet the power that I wield, with mere strength. With a glance I can crumble his strongest fortifications. So he must needs resort to bluster. I simply smiled in contemptuous silence. At last have I come to a level above him. I must never lose this vantage ground; never descend lower again. Amidst all my degradation this bit of dignity must remain to me!

"I know," said Sandip, after a pause, "it was your jewel−case."

"You may guess as you please," said I, "but you will get nothing out of me.

"So you trust Amulya more than you trust me? Do you know that the boy is the shadow of my shadow, the echo of my echo that he is nothing if I am not at his side?"

"Where he is not your echo, he is himself, Amulya. And that is where I trust him more than I can trust your echo!"

"You must not forget that you are under a promise to render up all your ornaments to me for the worship of the Divine Mother. In fact your offering has already been made."

"Whatever ornaments the gods leave to me will be offered up to the gods. But how can I offer those which have been stolen away from me?"

"Look here, it is no use your trying to give me the slip in that fashion. Now is the time for grim work. Let that work be finished, then you can make a display of your woman's wiles to your heart's content and I will help you in your game."

The moment I had stolen my husband's money and paid it to Sandip, the music that was in our relations stopped. Not only did I destroy all my own value by making myself cheap, but Sandip's powers, too, lost scope for their full play. You cannot employ your marksmanship against a thing which is right in your grasp. So Sandip has lost his aspect of the hero; a tone of low quarrelsomeness has come into his words.

Sandip kept his brilliant eyes fixed full on my face till they seemed to blaze with all the thirst of the mid−day sky. Once or twice he fidgeted with his feet, as though to leave his seat, as if to spring right on me. My whole body seemed to swim, my veins throbbed, the hot blood surged up to my ears; I felt that if I remained there, I should never get up at all. With a supreme effort I tore myself off the chair, and hastened towards the door.

From Sandip's dry throat there came a muffled cry: "Whither would you flee, Queen?" The next moment he left his seat with a bound to seize hold of me. At the sound of footsteps outside the door, however, he rapidly retreated and fell back into his chair. I checked my steps near the bookshelf, where I stood staring at the names of the books.

As my husband entered the room, Sandip exclaimed: "I say, Nikhil, don't you keep Browning among your books here? I was just telling Queen Bee of our college club. Do you remember that contest of ours over the translation of those lines from Browning? You don't?

> "She should never have looked at me,
> If she meant I should not love her,
> There are plenty . . . men you call such,
> I suppose . . . she may discover
> All her soul to, if she pleases,
> And yet leave much as she found them:
> But I'm not so, and she knew it
> When she fixed me, glancing round them.

"I managed to get together the words to render it into Bengali, somehow, but the result was hardly likely to be a 'joy forever' to the people of Bengal. I really did think at one time that I was on the verge of becoming a poet, but Providence was kind enough to save me from that disaster. Do you remember old Dakshina? If he

had not become a Salt Inspector, he would have been a poet. I remember his rendering to this day . . .

"No, Queen Bee, it is no use rummaging those bookshelves. Nikhil has ceased to read poetry since his marriage perhaps he has no further need for it. But I suppose 'the fever fit of poesy', as the Sanskrit has it, is about to attack me again."

"I have come to give you a warning, Sandip," said my husband.

"About the fever fit of poesy?"

My husband took no notice of this attempt at humour. "For some time," he continued, "Mahomedan preachers have been about stirring up the local Mussulmans. They are all wild with you, and may attack you any moment."

"Are you come to advise flight?"

"I have come to give you information, not to offer advice."

"Had these estates been mine, such a warning would have been necessary for the preachers, not for me. If, instead of trying to frighten me, you give them a taste of your intimidation, that would be worthier both of you and me. Do you know that your weakness is weakening your neighbouring *zamindar*s also?"

"I did not offer you my advice, Sandip. I wish you, too, would refrain from giving me yours. Besides, it is useless. And there is another thing I want to tell you. You and your followers have been secretly worrying and oppressing my tenantry. I cannot allow that any longer. So I must ask you to leave my territory."

"For fear of the Mussulmans, or is there any other fear you have to threaten me with?"

"There are fears the want of which is cowardice. In the name of those fears, I tell you, Sandip, you must go. In five days I shall be starting for Calcutta. I want you to accompany me. You may of course stay in my house there to that there is no objection."

"All right, I have still five days" time then. Meanwhile, Queen Bee, let me hum to you my song of parting from your honey−hive. Ah! you poet of modern Bengal! Throw open your doors and let me plunder your words. The theft is really yours, for it is my song which you have made your own let the name be yours by all means, but the song is mine." With this Sandip struck up in a deep, husky voice, which threatened to be out of tune, a song in the Bhairavi mode:

"In the springtime of your kingdom, my Queen,
Meetings and partings chase each other in their endless hide and seek,
And flowers blossom in the wake of those that droop and die in the shade.
In the springtime of your kingdom, my Queen,
My meeting with you had its own songs,
But has not also my leave−taking any gift to offer you?
That gift is my secret hope, which I keep hidden in the shadows of your flower garden,
That the rains of July may sweetly temper your fiery June."

His boldness was immense boldness which had no veil, but was naked as fire. One finds no time to stop it: it is like trying to resist a thunderbolt: the lightning flashes: it laughs at all resistance.

I left the room. As I was passing along the verandah towards the inner apartments, Amulya suddenly made

his appearance and came and stood before me.

"Fear nothing, Sister Rani," he said. "I am off tonight and shall not return unsuccessful."

"Amulya," said I, looking straight into his earnest, youthful face, "I fear nothing for myself, but may I never cease to fear for you."

Amulya turned to go, but before he was out of sight I called him back and asked: "Have you a mother, Amulya?"

"I have."

"A sister?"

"No, I am the only child of my mother. My father died when I was quite little."

"Then go back to your mother, Amulya."

"But, Sister Rani, I have now both mother and sister."

"Then, Amulya, before you leave tonight, come and have your dinner here."

"There won't be time for that. Let me take some food for the journey, consecrated with your touch."

"What do you specially like, Amulya?"

"If I had been with my mother I should have had lots of Poush cakes. Make some for me with your own hands, Sister Rani!"

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25. Of the *Ramayana.* The story of his devotion to his elder brother Rama and his brother's wife Sita, has become a byword.

Chapter Ten. Nikhil's Story

XII

I LEARNT from my master that Sandip had joined forces with Harish Kundu, and there was to be a grand celebration of the worship of the demon−destroying Goddess. Harish Kundu was extorting the expenses from his tenantry. Pandits Kaviratna and Vidyavagish had been commissioned to compose a hymn with a double meaning.

My master has just had a passage at arms with Sandip over this. "Evolution is at work amongst the gods as well," says Sandip. "The grandson has to remodel the gods created by the grandfather to suit his own taste, or else he is left an atheist. It is my mission to modernize the ancient deities. I am born the saviour of the gods, to emancipate them from the thraldom of the past."

I have seen from our boyhood what a juggler with ideas is Sandip. He has no interest in discovering truth, but to make a quizzical display of it rejoices his heart. Had he been born in the wilds of Africa he would have

spent a glorious time inventing argument after argument to prove that cannibalism is the best means of promoting true communion between man and man. But those who deal in delusion end by deluding themselves, and I fully believe that, each time Sandip creates a new fallacy, he persuades himself that he has found the truth, however contradictory his creations may . be to one another.

However, I shall not give a helping hand to establish a liquor distillery in my country. The young men, who are ready to offer their services for their country's cause, must not fall into this habit of getting intoxicated. The people who want to exact work by drugging methods set more value on the excitement than on the minds they intoxicate.

I had to tell Sandip, in Bimala's presence, that he must go. Perhaps both will impute to me the wrong motive. But I must free myself also from all fear of being misunderstood. Let even Bimala misunderstand me . . .

A number of Mahomedan preachers are being sent over from Dacca. The Mussulmans in my territory had come to have almost as much of an aversion to the killing of cows as the Hindus. But now cases of cow−killing are cropping up here and there. I had the news first from some of my Mussulman tenants with expressions of their disapproval. Here was a situation which I could see would be difficult to meet. At the bottom was a pretence of fanaticism, which would cease to be a pretence if obstructed. That is just where the ingenuity of the move came in!

I sent for some of my principal Hindu tenants and tried to get them to see the matter in its proper light. "We can be staunch in our own convictions," I said, "but we have no control over those of others. For all that many of us are Vaishnavas, those of us who are Shaktas go on with their animal sacrifices just the same. That cannot be helped. We must, in the same way, let the Mussulmans do as they think best. So please refrain from all disturbance."

"Maharaja," they replied, "these outrages have been unknown for so long."

"That was so," I said, "because such was their spontaneous desire. Let us behave in such a way that the same may become true, over again. But a breach of the peace is not the way to bring this about."

"No, Maharaja," they insisted, "those good old days are gone. This will never stop unless you put it down with a strong hand."

"Oppression," I replied, "will not only not prevent cow−killing, it may lead to the killing of men as well."

One of them had had an English education. He had learnt to repeat the phrases of the day. "It is not only a question of orthodoxy," he argued. "Our country is mainly agricultural, and cows are . . ."

"Buffaloes in this country," I interrupted, "likewise give milk and are used for ploughing. And therefore, so long as we dance frantic dances on our temple pavements, smeared with their blood, their severed heads carried on our shoulders, religion will only laugh at us if we quarrel with Mussulmans in her name, and nothing but the quarrel itself will remain true. If the cow alone is to be held sacred from slaughter, and not the buffalo, then that is bigotry, not religion."

"But are you not aware, sir, of what is behind all this?" pursued the English−knowing tenant. "This has only become possible because the Mussulman is assured of safety, even if he breaks the law. Have you not heard of the Pachur case?"

"Why is it possible," I asked, "to use the Mussulmans thus, as tools against us? Is it not because we have fashioned them into such with our own intolerance? That is how Providence punishes us. Our accumulated

sins are being visited on our own heads."

"Oh, well, if that be so, let them be visited on us. But we shall have our revenge. We have undermined what was the greatest strength of the authorities, their devotion to their own laws. Once they were truly kings, dispensing justice; now they themselves will become law−breakers, and so no better than robbers. This may not go down to history, but we shall carry it in our hearts for all time . . ."

The evil reports about me which are spreading from paper to paper are making me notorious. News comes that my effigy has been burnt at the river−side burning−ground of the Chakravartis, with due ceremony and enthusiasm; and other insults are in contemplation. The trouble was that they had come to ask me to take shares in a Cotton Mill they wanted to start. I had to tell them that I did not so much mind the loss of my own money, but I would not be a party to causing a loss to so many poor shareholders.

"Are we to understand, Maharaja," said my visitors, "that the prosperity of the country does not interest you?"

"Industry may lead to the country's prosperity," I explained, "but a mere desire for its prosperity will not make for success in industry. Even when our heads were cool, our industries did not flourish. Why should we suppose that they will do so just because we have become frantic?"

"Why not say plainly that you will not risk your money?"

"I will put in my money when I see that it is industry which prompts you. But, because you have lighted a fire, it does not follow that you have the food to cook over it."

XIII

What is this? Our Chakua sub−treasury looted! A remittance of seven thousand five hundred rupees was due from there to headquarters. The local cashier had changed the cash at the Government Treasury into small currency notes for convenience in carrying, and had kept them ready in bundles. In the middle of the night an armed band had raided the room, and wounded Kasim, the man on guard. The curious part of it was that they had taken only six thousand rupees and left the rest scattered on the floor, though it would have been as easy to carry that away also. Anyhow, the raid of the dacoits was over; now the police raid would begin. Peace was out of the question.

When I went inside, I found the news had travelled before me. "What a terrible thing, brother," exclaimed the Bara Rani. "Whatever shall we do?"

I made light of the matter to reassure her. "We still have something left," I said with a smile. "We shall manage to get along somehow."

"Don't joke about it, brother dear. Why are they all so angry with you? Can't you humour them? Why put everybody out?"

"I cannot let the country go to rack and ruin, even if that would please everybody."

"That was a shocking thing they did at the burning−grounds. It's a horrid shame to treat you so. The Chota Rani has got rid of all her fears by dint of the Englishwoman's teaching, but as for me, I had to send for the priest to avert the omen before I could get any peace of mind. For my sake, dear, do get away to Calcutta. I tremble to think what they may do, if you stay on here."

My sister−in−law's genuine anxiety touched me deeply.

"And, brother," she went on, "did I not warn you, it was not well to keep so much money in your room? They might get wind of it any day. It is not the money but who knows. . ."

To calm her I promised to remove the money to the treasury at once, and then get it away to Calcutta with the first escort going. We went together to my bedroom. The dressing−room door was shut. When I knocked, Bimala called out: "I am dressing."

"I wonder at the Chota Rani," exclaimed my sister−in−law, "dressing so early in the day! One of their *Bande Mataram* meetings, I suppose. Robber Queen!" she called out in jest to Bimala. "Are you counting your spoils inside?"

"I will attend to the money a little later," I said, as I came away to my office room outside.

I found the Police Inspector waiting for me. "Any trace of the dacoits?" I asked.

"I have my suspicions."

"On whom?"

"Kasim, the guard."

"Kasim? But was he not wounded?"

"A mere nothing. A flesh wound on the leg. Probably self−inflicted."

"But I cannot bring myself to believe it. He is such a trusted servant."

"You may have trusted him, but that does not prevent his being a thief. Have I not seen men trusted for twenty years together, suddenly developing. . ."

"Even if it were so, I could not send him to gaol. But why should he have left the rest of the money lying about?"

"To put us off the scent. Whatever you may say, Maharaja, he must be an old hand at the game. He mounts guard during his watch, right enough, but I feel sure he has a finger in all the dacoities going on in the neighbourhood."

With this the Inspector proceeded to recount the various methods by which it was possible to be concerned in a dacoity twenty or thirty miles away, and yet be back in time for duty.

"Have you brought Kasim here?" I asked.

"No," was the reply, "he is in the lock−up. The Magistrate is due for the investigation."

"I want to see him," I said.

When I went to his cell he fell at my feet, weeping. "In God's name," he said, "I swear I did not do this thing."

"I do not doubt you, Kasim," I assured him. "Fear nothing. They can do nothing to you, if you are innocent."

Kasim, however, was unable to give a coherent account of the incident. He was obviously exaggerating. Four

or five hundred men, big guns, numberless swords, figured in his narrative. It must have been either his disturbed state of mind or a desire to account for his easy defeat. He would have it that this was Harish Kundu's doing; he was even sure he had heard the voice of Ekram, the head retainer of the Kundus.

"Look here, Kasim," I had to warn him, "don't you be dragging other people in with your stories. You are not called upon to make out a case against Harish Kundu, or anybody else."

XIV

On returning home I asked my master to come over. He shook his head gravely. "I see no good in this," said he "this setting aside of conscience and putting the country in its place. All the sins of the country will now break out, hideous and unashamed."

"Who do you think could have . . ."

"Don't ask me. But sin is rampant. Send them all away, right away from here."

"I have given them one more day. They will be leaving the day after tomorrow."

"And another thing. Take Bimala away to Calcutta. She is getting too narrow a view of the outside world from here, she cannot see men and things in their true proportions. Let her see the world men and their work give her abroad vision."

"That is exactly what I was thinking."

"Well, don't make any delay about it. I tell you, Nikhil, man's history has to be built by the united effort of all the races in the world, and therefore this selling of conscience for political reasons this making a fetish of one's country, won't do. I know that Europe does not at heart admit this, but there she has not the right to pose as our teacher. Men who die for the truth become immortal: and, if a whole people can die for the truth, it will also achieve immortality in the history of humanity. Here, in this land of India, amid the mocking laughter of Satan piercing the sky, may the feeling for this truth become real! What a terrible epidemic of sin has been brought into our country from foreign lands. . ."

The whole day passed in the turmoil of investigation. I was tired out when I retired for the night. I left over sending my sister−in−law's money to the treasury till next morning.

I woke up from my sleep at dead of night. The room was dark. I thought I heard a moaning somewhere. Somebody must have been crying. Sounds of sobbing came heavy with tears like fitful gusts of wind in the rainy night. It seemed to me that the cry rose from the heart of my room itself. I was alone. For some days Bimala had her bed in another room adjoining mine. I rose up and when I went out I found her in the balcony lying prone upon her face on the bare floor.

This is something that cannot be written in words. He only knows it who sits in the bosom of the world and receives all its pangs in His own heart. The sky is dumb, the stars are mute, the night is still, and in the midst of it all that one sleepless cry!

We give these sufferings names, bad or good, according to the classifications of the books, but this agony which is welling up from a torn heart, pouring into the fathomless dark, has it any name? When in that midnight, standing under the silent stars, I looked upon that figure, my mind was struck with awe, and I said to myself: "Who am Ito judge her?" O life, O death, O God of the infinite existence, I bow my head in silence to the mystery which is in you.

Once I thought I should turn back. But I could not. I sat down on the ground near Bimala and placed my hand on her head. At the first touch her whole body seemed to stiffen, but the next moment the hardness gave way, and the tears burst out. I gently passed my fingers over her forehead. Suddenly her hands groping for my feet grasped them and drew them to herself, pressing them against her breast with such force that I thought her heart would break.

Bimala's Story

XVIII

Amulya is due to return from Calcutta this morning. I told the servants to let me know as soon as he arrived, but could not keep still. At last I went outside to await him in the sitting−room.

When I sent him off to sell the jewels I must have been thinking only of myself. It never even crossed my mind that so young a boy, trying to sell such valuable jewellery, would at once be suspected. So helpless are we women, we needs must place on others the burden of our danger. When we go to our death we drag down those who are about us.

I had said with pride that I would save Amulya as if she who was drowning could save others. But instead of saving him, I have sent him to his doom. My little brother, such a sister have I been to you that Death must have smiled on that Brothers' Day when I gave you my blessing I, who wander distracted with the burden of my own evil−doing.

I feel today that man is at times attacked with evil as with the plague. Some germ finds its way in from somewhere, and then in the space of one night Death stalks in. Why cannot the stricken one be kept far away from the rest of the world? I, at least, have realized how terrible is the contagion like a fiery torch which burns that it may set the world on fire.

It struck nine. I could not get rid of the idea that Amulya was in trouble, that he had fallen into the clutches of the police. There must be great excitement in the Police Office whose are the jewels? where did he get them? And in the end I shall have to furnish the answer, in public, before all the world.

What is that answer to be? Your day has come at last, Bara Rani, you whom I have so long despised. You, in the shape of the public, the world, will have your revenge. O God, save me this time, and I will cast all my pride at my sister−in−law's feet.

I could bear it no longer. I went straight to the Bara Rani. She was in the verandah, spicing her betel leaves, Thako at her side. The sight of Thako made me shrink back for a moment, but I overcame all hesitation, and making a low obeisance I took the dust of my elder sister−in−law's feet.

"Bless my soul, Chota Rani," she exclaimed, "what has come upon you? Why this sudden reverence?"

"It is my birthday, sister," said I. "I have caused you pain. Give me your blessing today that I may never do so again. My mind is so small." I repeated my obeisance and left her hurriedly, but she called me back.

"You never before told me that this was your birthday, Chotie darling! Be sure to come and have lunch with me this afternoon. You positively must."

O God, let it really be my birthday today. Can I not be born over again? Cleanse me, my God, and purify me and give me one more trial!

I went again to the sitting−room to find Sandip there. A feeling of disgust seemed to poison my very blood. The face of his, which I saw in the morning light, had nothing of the magic radiance of genius.

"Will you leave the room," I blurted out.

Sandip smiled. "Since Amulya is not here," he remarked, "I should think my turn had come for a special talk."

My fate was coming back upon me. How was Ito take away the right I myself had given. "I would be alone," I repeated.

"Queen," he said, "the presence of another person does not prevent your being alone. Do not mistake me for one of the crowd. I, Sandip, am always alone, even when surrounded by thousands."

"Please come some other time. This morning I am . . ."

"Waiting for Amulya?"

I turned to leave the room for sheer vexation, when Sandip drew out from the folds of his cloak that jewel−casket of mine and banged it down on the marble table. I was thoroughly startled. "Has not Amulya gone, then?" I exclaimed.

"Gone where?"

"To Calcutta?"

"No," chuckled Sandip.

Ah, then my blessing had come true, in spite of all. He was saved. Let God's punishment fall on me, the thief, if only Amulya be safe.

The change in my countenance roused Sandip's scorn. "So pleased, Queen!" sneered he. "Are these jewels so very precious? How then did you bring yourself to offer them to the Goddess? Your gift was actually made. Would you now take it back?"

Pride dies hard and raises its fangs to the last. It was clear to me I must show Sandip I did not care a rap about these jewels. "If they have excited your greed," I said, "you may have them."

"My greed today embraces the wealth of all Bengal," replied Sandip. "Is there a greater force than greed? It is the steed of the great ones of the earth, as is the elephant, Airauat, the steed of Indra. So then these jewels are mine?"

As Sandip took up and replaced the casket under his cloak, Amulya rushed in. There were dark rings under his eyes, his lips were dry, his hair tumbled: the freshness of his youth seemed to have withered in a single day. Pangs gripped my heart as I looked on him.

"My box!" he cried, as he went straight up to Sandip without a glance at me. "Have you taken that jewel−box from my trunk?"

"Your jewel−box?" mocked Sandip.

"It was my trunk!"

Sandip burst out into a laugh. "Your distinctions between mine and yours are getting rather thin, Amulya," he cried. "You will die a religious preacher yet, I see."

Amulya sank on a chair with his face in his hands. I went up to him and placing my hand on his head asked him: "What is your trouble, Amulya?"

He stood straight up as he replied: "I had set my heart, Sister Rani, on returning your jewels to you with my own hand. Sandip Babu knew this, but he forestalled me."

"What do I care for my jewels?" I said. "Let them go. No harm is done.

"Go? Where?" asked the mystified boy.

"The jewels are mine," said Sandip. "Insignia bestowed on me by my Queen!"

"No, no, no," broke out Amulya wildly. "Never, Sister Rani! I brought them back for you. You shall not give them away to anybody else."

"I accept your gift, my little brother," said I. "But let him, who hankers after them, satisfy his greed."

Amulya glared at Sandip like a beast of prey, as he growled: "Look here, Sandip Babu, you know that even hanging has no terrors for me. If you dare take away that box of jewels . . ."

With an attempt at a sarcastic laugh Sandip said: "You also ought to know by this time, Amulya, that I am not the man to be afraid of you."

"Queen Bee," he went on, turning to me, "I did not come here today to take these jewels, I came to give them to you. You would have done wrong to take my gift at Amulya's hands. In order to prevent it, I had first to make them clearly mine. Now these my jewels are my gift to you. Here they are! Patch up any understanding with this boy you like. I must go. You have been at your special talks all these days together, leaving me out of them. If special happenings now come to pass, don't blame me.

"Amulya," he continued, "I have sent on your trunks and things to your lodgings. Don't you be keeping any belongings of yours in my room any longer." With this parting shot, Sandip flung out of the room.

XIX

"I have had no peace of mind, Amulya," I said to him, "ever since I sent you off to sell my jewels."

"Why, Sister Rani?"

"I was afraid lest you should get into trouble with them, lest they should suspect you for a thief. I would rather go without that six thousand. You must now do another thing for me go home at once, home to your mother."

Amulya produced a small bundle and said: "But, sister, I have got the six thousand."

"Where from?"

"I tried hard to get gold," he went on, without replying to my question, "but could not. So I had to bring it in notes."

"Tell me truly, Amulya, swear by me, where did you get this money?"

"That I will not tell you."

Everything seemed to grow dark before my eyes. "What terrible thing have you done, Amulya?" I cried. "Is it then . . ."

"I know you will say I got this money wrongly. Very well, I admit it. But I have paid the full price for my wrong−doing. So now the money is mine."

I no longer had any desire to learn more about it. My very blood−vessels contracted, making my whole body shrink within itself.

"Take it away, Amulya," I implored. "Put it back where you got it from."

"That would be hard indeed!"

"It is not hard, brother dear. It was an evil moment when you first came to me. Even Sandip has not been able to harm you as I have done."

Sandip's name seemed to stab him.

"Sandip!" he cried. "It was you alone who made me come to know that man for what he is. Do you know, sister, he has not spent a pice out of those sovereigns he took from you? He shut himself into his room, after he left you, and gloated over the gold, pouring it out in a heap on the floor. 'This is not money,' he exclaimed, 'but the petals of the divine lotus of power; crystallized strains of music from the pipes that play in the paradise of wealth! I cannot find it in my heart to change them, for they seem longing to fulfil their destiny of adorning the neck of Beauty. Amulya, my boy, don't you look at these with your fleshly eye, they are Lakshmi's smile, the gracious radiance of Indra's queen. No, no, I can't give them up to that boor of a manager. I am sure, Amulya, he was telling us lies. The police haven't traced the man who sank that boat. It's the manager who wants to make something out of it. We must get those letters back from him.'

"I asked him how we were to do this; he told me to use force or threats. I offered to do so if he would return the gold. That, he said, we could consider later. I will not trouble you, sister, with all I did to frighten the man into giving up those letters and burn them it is a long story. That very night I came to Sandip and said: 'We are now safe. Let me have the sovereigns to return them tomorrow to my sister, the Maharani.' But he cried, 'What infatuation is this of yours? Your precious sister's skirt bids fair to hide the whole country from you. Say *Bande Mataram* and exorcize the evil spirit.'

"You know, Sister Rani, the power of Sandip's magic. The gold remained with him. And I spent the whole dark night on the bathing−steps of the lake muttering *Bande Mataram*.

"Then when you gave me your jewels to sell, I went again to Sandip. I could see he was angry with me. But he tried not to show it. 'If I still have them hoarded up in any box of mine you may take them,' said he, as he flung me his keys. They were nowhere to be seen. 'Tell me where they are,' I said. 'I will do so,' he replied, 'when I find your infatuation has left you. Not now.'

"When I found I could not move him, I had to employ other methods. Then I tried to get the sovereigns from

him in exchange for my currency notes for six thousand rupees. 'You shall have them,' he said, and disappeared into his bedroom, leaving me waiting outside. There he broke open my trunk and came straight to you with your casket through some other passage. He would not let me bring it, and now he dares call it his gift. How can I tell how much he has deprived me of? I shall never forgive him.

"But, oh sister, his power over me has been utterly broken. And it is you who have broken it!"

"Brother dear," said I, "if that is so, then my life is justified. But more remains to be done, Amulya. It is not enough that the spell has been destroyed. Its stains must be washed away. Don't delay any longer, go at once and put back the money where you took it from. Can you not do it, dear?"

"With your blessing everything is possible, Sister Rani."

"Remember, it will not be your expiation alone, but mine also. I am a woman; the outside world is closed to me, else I would have gone myself. My hardest punishment is that I must put on you the burden of my sin."

"Don't say that, sister. The path I was treading was not your path. It attracted me because of its dangers and difficulties. Now that your path calls me, let it be a thousand times more difficult and dangerous, the dust of your feet will help me to win through. Is it then your command that this money be replaced?"

"Not my command, brother mine, but a command from above."

"Of that I know nothing. It is enough for me that this command from above comes from your lips. And, sister, I thought I had an invitation here. I must not lose that. You must give me your *prasad* [26] before I go. Then, if I can possibly manage it, I will finish my duty in the evening."

Tears came to my eyes when I tried to smile as I said: "So be it."

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26. Food consecrated by the touch of a revered person.

Chapter Eleven. Bimala's Story

XX

WITH Amulya's departure my heart sank within me. On what perilous adventure had I sent this only son of his mother? O God, why need my expiation have such pomp and circumstance? Could I not be allowed to suffer alone without inviting all this multitude to share my punishment? Oh, let not this innocent child fall victim to Your wrath.

I called him back "Amulya!"

My voice sounded so feebly, it failed to reach him.

I went up to the door and called again: "Amulya!"

He had gone.

"Who is there?"

"Rani Mother!"

"Go and tell Amulya Babu that I want him."

What exactly happened I could not make out the man, perhaps, was not familiar with Amulya's name but he returned almost at once followed by Sandip.

"The very moment you sent me away," he said as he came in, "I had a presentiment that you would call me back. The attraction of the same moon causes both ebb and flow. I was so sure of being sent for, that I was actually waiting out in the passage. As soon as I caught sight of your man, coming from your room, I said: 'Yes, yes, I am coming, I am coming at once!' before he could utter a word. That up−country lout was surprised, I can tell you! He stared at me, open−mouthed, as if he thought I knew magic.

"All the fights in the world, Queen Bee," Sandip rambled on, "are really fights between hypnotic forces. Spell cast against spell noiseless weapons which reach even invisible targets. At last I have met in you my match. Your quiver is full, I know, you artful warrior Queen! You are the only one in the world who has been able to turn Sandip out and call Sandip back, at your sweet will. Well, your quarry is at your feet. What will you do with him now? Will you give him the coup de grâce, or keep him in your cage? Let me warn you beforehand, Queen, you will find the beast as difficult to kill outright as to keep in bondage. Anyway, why lose time in trying your magic weapons?"

Sandip must have felt the shadow of approaching defeat, and this made him try to gain time by chattering away without waiting for a reply. I believe he knew that I had sent the messenger for Amulya, whose name the man must have mentioned. In spite of that he had deliberately played this trick. He was now trying to avoid giving me any opening to tell him that it was Amulya I wanted, not him. But his stratagem was futile, for I could see his weakness through it. I must not yield up a pin's point of the ground I had gained.

"Sandip Babu," I said, "I wonder how you can go on making these endless speeches, without a stop. Do you get them up by heart, beforehand?"

Sandip's face flushed instantly.

"I have heard," I continued, "that our professional reciters keep a book full of all kinds of ready−made discourses, which can be fitted into any subject. Have you also a book?"

Sandip ground out his reply through his teeth. "God has given you women a plentiful supply of coquetry to start with, and on the top of that you have the milliner and the jeweller to help you; but do not think we men are so helpless . . ."

"You had better go back and look up your book, Sandip Babu. You are getting your words all wrong. That's just the trouble with trying to repeat things by rote."

"You!" shouted Sandip, losing all control over himself. "You to insult me thus! What is there left of you that I do not know to the very bottom? What . . ." He became speechless.

Sandip, the wielder of magic spells, is reduced to utter powerlessness, whenever his spell refuses to work. From a king he fell to the level of a boor. Oh, the joy of witnessing his weakness! The harsher he became in his rudeness, the more did this joy well up within me. His snaky coils, with which he used to snare me, are exhausted I am free. I am saved, saved. Be rude to me, insult me, for that shows you in your truth; but spare me your songs of praise, which were false.

My husband came in at this juncture. Sandip had not the elasticity to recover himself in a moment, as he used to do before. My husband looked at him for a while in surprise. Had this happened some days ago I should have felt ashamed. But today I was pleased whatever my husband might think. I wanted to have it out to the finish with my weakening adversary.

Finding us both silent and constrained, my husband hesitated a little, and then took a chair. "Sandip," he said, "I have been looking for you, and was told you were here."

"I am here," said Sandip with some emphasis. "Queen Bee sent for me early this morning. And I, the humble worker of the hive, left all else to attend her summons."

"I am going to Calcutta tomorrow. You will come with me.

"And why, pray? Do you take me for one of your retinue?"

"Oh, very well, take it that you are going to Calcutta, and that I am your follower."

"I have no business there."

"All the more reason for going. You have too much business here."

"I don't propose to stir."

"Then I propose to shift you."

"Forcibly?"

"Forcibly."

"Very well, then, I will make a move. But the world is not divided between Calcutta and your estates. There are other places on the map."

"From the way you have been going on, one would hardly have thought that there was any other place in the world except my estates."

Sandip stood up. "It does happen at times," he said, "that a man's whole world is reduced to a single spot. I have realized my universe in this sitting−room of yours, that is why I have been a fixture here."

Then he turned to me. "None but you, Queen Bee," he said, "will understand my words perhaps not even you. I salute you. With worship in my heart I leave you. My watchword has changed since you have come across my vision. It is no longer *Bande Mataram* (Hail Mother), but Hail Beloved, Hail Enchantress. The mother protects, the mistress leads to destruction but sweet is that destruction. You have made the anklet sounds of the dance of death tinkle in my heart. You have changed for me, your devotee, the picture I had of this Bengal of ours 'the soft breeze−cooled land of pure water and sweet fruit.' [27] You have no pity, my beloved. You have come to me with your poison cup and I shall drain it, either to die in agony or live triumphing over death.

"Yes," he continued. "The mother's day is past. O love, my love, you have made as naught for me the truth and right and heaven itself. All duties have become as shadows: all rules and restraints have snapped their bonds. O love, my love, I could set fire to all the world outside this land on which you have set your dainty feet, and dance in mad revel over the ashes . . . These are mild men. These are good men. They would do

good to all as if this all were a reality! No, no! There is no reality in the world save this one real love of mine. I do you reverence. My devotion to you has made me cruel; my worship of you has lighted the raging flame of destruction within me. I am not righteous. I have no beliefs, I only believe in her whom, above all else in the world, I have been able to realize."

Wonderful! It was wonderful, indeed. Only a minute ago I had despised this man with all my heart. But what I had thought to be dead ashes now glowed with living fire. The fire in him is true, that is beyond doubt. Oh why has God made man such a mixed creature? Was it only to show his supernatural sleight of hand? Only a few minutes ago I had thought that Sandip, whom I had once taken to be a hero, was only the stage hero of melodrama. But that is not so, not so. Even behind the trappings of the theatre, a true hero may sometimes be lurking.

There is much in Sandip that is coarse, that is sensuous, that is false, much that is overlaid with layer after layer of fleshly covering. Yet yet it is best to confess that there is a great deal in the depths of him which we do not, cannot understand much in ourselves too. A wonderful thing is man. What great mysterious purpose he is working out only the Terrible One [28] knows meanwhile we groan under the brunt of it. Shiva is the Lord of Chaos. He is all Joy. He will destroy our bonds.

I cannot but feel, again and again, that there are two persons in me. One recoils from Sandip in his terrible aspect of Chaos the other feels that very vision to be sweetly alluring. The sinking ship drags down all who are swimming round it. Sandip is just such a force of destruction. His immense attraction gets hold of one before fear can come to the rescue, and then, in the twinkiing of an eye, one is drawn away, irresistibly, from all light, all good, all freedom of the sky, all air that can be breathed from lifelong accumulations, from everyday cares right to the bottom of dissolution.

From some realm of calamity has Sandip come as its messenger; and as he stalks the land, muttering unholy incantations, to him flock all the boys and youths. The mother, seated in the lotus−heart of the Country, is wailing her heart out; for they have broken open her store−room, there to hold their drunken revelry. Her vintage of the draught for the immortals they would pour out on the dust; her time−honoured vessels they would smash to pieces. True, I feel with her; but, at the same time, I cannot help being infected with their excitement.

Truth itself has sent us this temptation to test our trustiness in upholding its commandments. Intoxication masquerades in heavenly garb, and dances before the pilgrims saying: "Fools you are that pursue the fruitless path of renunciation. Its way is long, its time passing slow. So the Wielder of the Thunderbolt has sent me to you. Behold, I the beautiful, the passionate, I will accept you in my embrace you shall find fulfilment."

After a pause Sandip addressed me again: "Goddess, the time has come for me to leave you. It is well. The work of your nearness has been done. By lingering longer it would only become undone again, little by little. All is lost, if in our greed we try to cheapen that which is the greatest thing on earth. That which is eternal within the moment only becomes shallow if spread out in time. We were about to spoil our infinite moment, when it was your uplifted thunderbolt which came to the rescue. You intervened to save the purity of your own worship and in so doing you also saved your worshipper. In my leave−taking today your worship stands out the biggest thing. Goddess, I, also, set you free today. My earthen temple could hold you no longer every moment it was on the point of breaking apart. Today I depart to worship your larger image in a larger temple. I can gain you more truly only at a distance from yourself. Here I had only your favour, there I shall be vouchsafed your boon."

My jewel−casket was lying on the table. I held it up aloft as I said: "I charge you to convey these my jewels to the object of my worship to whom I have dedicated them through you."

My husband remained silent. Sandip left the room.

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27. Quotation from the National song *Bande Mataram*.

28. Rudra, the Terrible, a name of Shiva. [Trans.].

XXI

I had just sat down to make some cakes for Amulya when the Bara Rani came upon the scene. "Oh dear," she exclaimed, "has it come to this that you must make cakes for your own birthday?"

"Is there no one else for whom I could be making them?" I asked.

"But this is not the day when you should think of feasting others. It is for us to feast you. I was just thinking of making something up [29] when I heard the staggering news which completely upset me. A gang of five or six hundred men, they say, has raided one of our treasuries and made off with six thousand rupees. Our house will be looted next, they expect."

I felt greatly relieved. So it was our own money after all. I wanted to send for Amulya at once and tell him that he need only hand over those notes to my husband and leave the explanations to me.

"You are a wonderful creature!" my sister−in−law broke out, at the change in my countenance. "Have you then really no such thing as fear?"

"I cannot believe it," I said. "Why should they loot our house?"

"Not believe it, indeed! Who could have believed that they would attack our treasury, either?"

I made no reply, but bent over my cakes, putting in the cocoa−nut stuffing.

"Well, I'm off," said the Bara Rani after a prolonged stare at me. "I must see Brother Nikhil and get something done about sending off my money to Calcutta, before it's too late."

She was no sooner gone than I left the cakes to take care of themselves and rushed to my dressing−room, shutting myself inside. My husband's tunic with the keys in its pocket was still hanging there so forgetful was he. I took the key of the iron safe off the ring and kept it by me, hidden in the folds of my dress.

Then there came a knocking at the door. "I am dressing," I called out. I could hear the Bara Rani saying: "Only a minute ago I saw her making cakes and now she is busy dressing up. What next, I wonder! One of their *Bande Mataram* meetings is on, I suppose. I say, Robber Queen," she called out to me, "are you taking stock of your loot?"

When they went away I hardly know what made me open the safe. Perhaps there was a lurking hope that it might all be a dream. What if, on pulling out the inside drawer, I should find the rolls of gold there, just as before? . . . Alas, everything was empty as the trust which had been betrayed.

I had to go through the farce of dressing. I had to do my hair up all over again, quite unnecessarily. When I came out my sister−in−law railed at me: "How many times are you going to dress today?"

"My birthday!" I said.

"Oh, any pretext seems good enough," she went on. "Many vain people have I seen in my day, but you beat them all hollow."

I was about to summon a servant to send after Amulya, when one of the men came up with a little note, which he handed to me. It was from Amulya. "Sister," he wrote, you invited me this afternoon, but I thought I should not wait. Let me first execute your bidding and then come for my *prasad*. I may be a little late."

To whom could he be going to return that money? into what fresh entanglement was the poor boy rushing? O miserable woman, you can only send him off like an arrow, but not recall him if you miss your aim.

I should have declared at once that I was at the bottom of this robbery. But women live on the trust of their surroundings this is their whole world. If once it is out that this trust has been secretly betrayed, their place in their world is lost. They have then to stand upon the fragments of the thing they have broken, and its jagged edges keep on wounding them at every turn. To sin is easy enough, but to make up for it is above all difficult for a woman.

For some time past all easy approaches for communion with my husband have been closed to me. How then could I burst on him with this stupendous news? He was very late in coming for his meal today nearly two o'clock. He was absent−minded and hardly touched any food. I had lost even the right to press him to take a little more. I had to avert my face to wipe away my tears.

I wanted so badly to say to him: "Do come into our room and rest awhile; you look so tired." I had just cleared my throat with a little cough, when a servant hurried in to say that the Police Inspector had brought Panchu up to the palace. My husband, with the shadow on his face deepened, left his meal unfinished and went out.

A little later the Bara Rani appeared. "Why did you not send me word when Brother Nikhil came in?" she complained. "As he was late I thought I might as well finish my bath in the meantime. However did he manage to get through his meal so soon?"

"Why, did you want him for anything?"

"What is this about both of you going off to Calcutta tomorrow? All I can say is, I am not going to be left here alone. I should get startled out of my life at every sound, with all these dacoits about. Is it quite settled about your going tomorrow?"

"Yes," said I, though I had only just now heard it; and though, moreover, I was not at all sure that before tomorrow our history might not take such a turn as to make it all one whether we went or stayed. After that, what our home, our life would be like, was utterly beyond my ken it seemed so misty and phantom−like.

In a very few hours now my unseen fate would become visible. Was there no one who could keep on postponing the flight of these hours, from day to day, and so make them long enough for me to set things right, so far as lay in my power? The time during which the seed lies underground is long so long indeed that one forgets that there is any danger of its sprouting. But once its shoot shows up above the surface, it grows and grows so fast, there is no time to cover it up, neither with skirt, nor body, nor even life itself.

I will try to think of it no more, but sit quiet passive and callous let the crash come when it may. By the day after tomorrow all will be over publicity, laughter, bewailing, questions, explanations everything.

But I cannot forget the face of Amulya beautiful, radiant with devotion. He did not wait, despairing, for the blow of fate to fall, but rushed into the thick of danger. In my misery I do him reverence. He is my boy−god. Under the pretext of his playfulness he took from me the weight of my burden. He would save me by taking the punishment meant for me on his own head. But how am Ito bear this terrible mercy of my God?

Oh, my child, my child, I do you reverence. Little brother mine, I do you reverence. Pure are you, beautiful are you, I do you reverence. May you come to my arms, in the next birth, as my own child that is my prayer.

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29. Any dainties to be offered ceremonially should be made by the lady of the house herself. [Trans.].

XXII

Rumour became busy on every side. The police were continually in and out. The servants of the house were in a great flurry.

Khema, my maid, came up to me and said: "Oh, Rani Mother! for goodness" sake put away my gold necklace and armlets in your iron safe." To whom was Ito explain that the Rani herself had been weaving all this network of trouble, and had got caught in it, too? I had to play the benign protector and take charge of Khema's ornaments and Thako's savings. The milk−woman, in her turn, brought along and kept in my room a box in which were a Benares *sari* and some other of her valued possessions. "I got these at your wedding," she told me.

When, tomorrow, my iron safe will be opened in the presence of these Khema, Thako, the milk−woman and all the rest . . . Let me not think of it! Let me rather try to think what it will be like when this third day of Magh comes round again after a year has passed. Will all the wounds of my home life then be still as fresh as ever? . . .

Amulya writes that he will come later in the evening. I cannot remain alone with my thoughts, doing nothing. So I sit down again to make cakes for him. I have finished making quite a quantity, but still I must go on. Who will eat them? I shall distribute them amongst the servants. I must do so this very night. Tonight is my limit. Tomorrow will not be in my hands.

I went on untiringly, frying cake after cake. Every now and then it seemed to me that there was some noise in the direction of my rooms, upstairs. Could it be that my husband had missed the key of the safe, and the Bara Rani had assembled all the servants to help him to hunt for it? No, I must not pay heed to these sounds. Let me shut the door.

I rose to do so, when Thako came panting in: "Rani Mother, oh, Rani Mother!"

"Oh get away!" I snapped out, cutting her short. "Don't come bothering me."

"The Bara Rani Mother wants you," she went on. "Her nephew has brought such a wonderful machine from Calcutta. It talks like a man. Do come and hear it!"

I did not know whether to laugh or to cry. So, of all things, a gramophone needs must come on the scene at such a time, repeating at every winding the nasal twang of its theatrical songs! What a fearsome thing results when a machine apes a man.

The shades of evening began to fall. I knew that Amulya would not delay to announce himself yet I could

not wait. I summoned a servant and said: "Go and tell Amulya Babu to come straight in here." The man came back after a while to say that Amulya was not in he had not come back since he had gone.

"Gone!" The last word struck my ears like a wail in the gathering darkness. Amulya gone! Had he then come like a streak of light from the setting sun, only to be gone for ever? All kinds of possible and impossible dangers flitted through my mind. It was I who had sent him to his death. What if he was fearless? That only showed his own greatness of heart. But after this how was Ito go on living all by myself?

I had no memento of Amulya save that pistol his reverence−offering. It seemed to me that this was a sign given by Providence. This guilt which had contaminated my life at its very root my God in the form of a child had left with me the means of wiping it away, and then vanished. Oh the loving gift the saving grave that lay hidden within it!

I opened my box and took out the pistol, lifting it reverently to my forehead. At that moment the gongs clanged out from the temple attached to our house. I prostrated myself in salutation.

In the evening I feasted the whole household with my cakes. "You have managed a wonderful birthday feast and all by yourself too!" exclaimed my sister−in−law. "But you must leave something for us to do." With this she turned on her gramophone and let loose the shrill treble of the Calcutta actresses all over the place. It seemed like a stable full of neighing fillies.

It got quite late before the feasting was over. I had a sudden longing to end my birthday celebration by taking the dust of my husband's feet. I went up to the bedroom and found him fast asleep. He had had such a worrying, trying day. I raised the edge of the mosquito curtain very very gently, and laid my head near his feet. My hair must have touched him, for he moved his legs in his sleep and pushed my head away.

I then went out and sat in the west verandah. A silk−cotton tree, which had shed all its leaves, stood there in the distance, like a skeleton. Behind it the crescent moon was setting. All of a sudden I had the feeling that the very stars in the sky were afraid of me that the whole of the night world was looking askance at me. Why? Because I was alone.

There is nothing so strange in creation as the man who is alone. Even he whose near ones have all died, one by one, is not alone companionship comes for him from behind the screen of death. But he, whose kin are there, yet no longer near, who has dropped out of all the varied companionship of a full home the starry universe itself seems to bristle to look on him in his darkness.

Where I am, I am not. I am far away from those who are around me. I live and move upon a world−wide chasm of separation, unstable as the dew−drop upon the lotus leaf.

Why do not men change wholly when they change? When I look into my heart, I find everything that was there, still there only they are topsy−turvy. Things that were well−ordered have become jumbled up. The gems that were strung into a necklace are now rolling in the dust. And so my heart is breaking.

I feel I want to die. Yet in my heart everything still lives nor even in death can I see the end of it all: rather, in death there seems to be ever so much more of repining. What is to be ended must be ended in this life there is no other way out.

Oh forgive me just once, only this time, Lord! All that you gave into my hands as the wealth of my life, I have made into my burden. I can neither bear it longer, nor give it up. O Lord, sound once again those flute strains which you played for me, long ago, standing at the rosy edge of my morning sky and let all my complexities become simple and easy. Nothing save the music of your flute can make whole that which has

been broken, and pure that which has been sullied. Create my home anew with your music. No other way can I see.

I threw myself prone on the ground and sobbed aloud. It was for mercy that I prayed some little mercy from somewhere, some shelter, some sign of forgiveness, some hope that might bring about the end. "Lord," I vowed to myself, "I will lie here, waiting and waiting, touching neither food nor drink, so long as your blessing does not reach me."

I heard the sound of footsteps. Who says that the gods do not show themselves to mortal men? I did not raise my face to look up, lest the sight of it should break the spell. Come, oh come, come and let your feet touch my head. Come, Lord, and set your foot upon my throbbing heart, and at that moment let me die.

He came and sat near my head. Who? My husband! At the first touch of his presence I felt that I should swoon. And then the pain at my heart burst its way out in an overwhelming flood of tears, tearing through all my obstructing veins and nerves. I strained his feet to my bosom oh, why could not their impress remain there for ever?

He tenderly stroked my head. I received his blessing. Now I shall be able to take up the penalty of public humiliation which will be mine tomorrow, and offer it, in all sincerity, at the feet of my God.

But what keeps crushing my heart is the thought that the festive flutes which were played at my wedding, nine years ago, welcoming me to this house, will never sound for me again in this life. What rigour of penance is there which can serve to bring me once more, as a bride adorned for her husband, to my place upon that same bridal seat? How many years, how many ages, aeons, must pass before I can find my way back to that day of nine years ago?

God can create new things, but has even He the power to create afresh that which has been destroyed?

Chapter Twelve. Nikhil's Story

XV

TODAY we are going to Calcutta. Our joys and sorrows lie heavy on us if we merely go on accumulating them. Keeping them and accumulating them alike are false. As master of the house I am in an artificial position in reality I am a wayfarer on the path of life. That is why the true Master of the House gets hurt at every step and at last there comes the supreme hurt of death.

My union with you, my love, was only of the wayside; it was well enough so long as we followed the same road; it will only hamper us if we try to preserve it further. We are now leaving its bonds behind. We are started on our journey beyond, and it will be enough if we can throw each other a glance, or feel the touch of each other's hands in passing. After that? After that there is the larger world−path, the endless current of universal life.

How little can you deprive me of, my love, after all? Whenever I set my ear to it, I can hear the flute which is playing, its fountain of melody gushing forth from the flute−stops of separation. The immortal draught of the goddess is never exhausted. She sometimes breaks the bowl from which we drink it, only to smile at seeing us so disconsolate over the trifling loss. I will not stop to pick up my broken bowl. I will march forward, albeit with unsatisfied heart.

The Bara Rani came and asked me: "What is the meaning, brother, of all these books being packed up and

sent off in box−loads?"

"It only means," I replied, "that I have not yet been able to get over my fondness for them."

"I only wish you would keep your fondness for some other things as well! Do you mean you are never coming back home?"

"I shall be coming and going, but shall not immure myself here any more."

"Oh indeed! Then just come along to my room and see how many things *I* have been unable to shake off *my* fondness for." With this she took me by the hand and marched me off.

In my sister−in−law's rooms I found numberless boxes and bundles ready packed. She opened one of the boxes and said: "See, brother, look at all my *pan*−making things. In this bottle I have catechu powder scented with the pollen of screw−pine blossoms. These little tin boxes are all for different kinds of spices. I have not forgotten my playing cards and draught−board either. If you two are over−busy, I shall manage to make other friends there, who will give me a game. Do you remember this comb? It was one of the *Swadeshi* combs you brought for me. . ."

"But what is all this for, Sister Rani? Why have you been packing up all these things?"

"Do you think I am not going with you?"

"What an extraordinary idea!"

"Don't you be afraid! I am not going there to flirt with you, nor to quarrel with the Chota Rani! One must die sooner or later, and it is just as well to be on the bank of the holy Ganges before it is too late. It is too horrible to think of being cremated in your wretched burning−ground here, under that stumpy banian tree that is why I have been refusing to die, and have plagued you all this time."

At last I could hear the true voice of home. The Bara Rani came into our house as its bride, when I was only six years old. We have played together, through the drowsy afternoons, in a corner of the roof−terrace. I have thrown down to her green amras from the tree−top, to be made into deliciously indigestible chutnies by slicing them up with mustard, salt and fragrant herbs. It was my part to gather for her all the forbidden things from the store−room to be used in the marriage celebration of her doll; for, in the penal code of my grandmother, I alone was exempt from punishment. And I used to be appointed her messenger to my brother, whenever she wanted to coax something special out of him, because he could not resist my importunity. I also remember how, when I suffered under the rigorous régime of the doctors of those days who would not allow anything except warm water and sugared cardamom seeds during feverish attacks my sister−in−law could not bear my privation and used to bring me delicacies on the sly. What a scolding she got one day when she was caught!

And then, as we grew up, our mutual joys and sorrows took on deeper tones of intimacy. How we quarrelled! Sometimes conflicts of worldly interests roused suspicions and jealousies, making breaches in our love; and when the Chota Rani came in between us, these breaches seemed as if they would never be mended, but it always turned out that the healing forces at bottom proved more powerful than the wounds on the surface.

So has a true relationship grown up between us, from our childhood up till now, and its branching foliage has spread and broadened over every room and verandah and terrace of this great house. When I saw the Bara Rani make ready, with all her belongings, to depart from this house of ours, all the ties that bound us, to their wide−spreading ends, felt the shock.

The reason was clear to me, why she had made up her mind to drift away towards the unknown, cutting asunder all her lifelong bonds of daily habit, and of the house itself, which she had never left for a day since she first entered it at the age of nine. And yet it was this real reason which she could not allow to escape her lips, preferring rather to put forward any other paltry excuse.

She had only this one relationship left in all the world, and the poor, unfortunate, widowed and childless woman had cherished it with all the tenderness hoarded in her heart. How deeply she had felt our proposed separation I never realized so keenly as when I stood amongst her scattered boxes and bundles.

I could see at once that the little differences she used to have with Bimala, about money matters, did not proceed from any sordid worldliness, but because she felt that her claims in regard to this one relationship of her life had been overridden and its ties weakened for her by the coming in between of this other woman from goodness knows where! She had been hurt at every turn and yet had not the right to complain.

And Bimala? She also had felt that the Senior Rani's claim over me was not based merely on our social connection, but went much deeper; and she was jealous of these ties between us, reaching back to our childhood.

Today my heart knocked heavily against the doors of my breast. I sank down upon one of the boxes as I said: "How I should love, Sister Rani, to go back to the days when we first met in this old house of ours."

"No, brother dear," she replied with a sigh, "I would not live my life again not as a woman! Let what I have had to bear end with this one birth. I could not bear it over again."

I said to her: "The freedom to which we pass through sorrow is greater than the sorrow."

"That may be so for you men. Freedom is for you. But we women would keep others bound. We would rather be put into bondage ourselves. No, no, brother, you will never get free from our toils. If you needs must spread your wings, you will have to take us with you; we refuse to be left behind. That is why I have gathered together all this weight of luggage. It would never do to allow men to run too light."

"I can feel the weight of your words," I said laughing, "and if we men do not complain of your burdens, it is because women pay us so handsomely for what they make us carry."

"You carry it," she said, "because it is made up of many small things. Whichever one you think of rejecting pleads that it is so light. And so with much lightness we weigh you down . . . When do we start?"

"The train leaves at half past eleven tonight. There will be lots of time."

"Look here, do be good for once and listen to just one word of mine. Take a good nap this afternoon. You know you never get any sleep in the train. You look so pulled down, you might go to pieces any moment. Come along, get through your bath first."

As we went towards my room, Khema, the maid, came up and with an ultra−modest pull at her veil told us, in deprecatingly low tones, that the Police Inspector had arrived with a prisoner and wanted to see the Maharaja.

"Is the Maharaja a thief, or a robber," the Bara Rani flared up, "that he should be set upon so by the police? Go and tell the Inspector that the Maharaja is at his bath."

"Let me just go and see what is the matter," I pleaded. "It may be something urgent."

"No, no," my sister−in−law insisted. "Our Chota Rani was making a heap of cakes last night. I'll send some to the Inspector, to keep him quiet till you're ready." With this she pushed me into my room and shut the door on me.

I had not the power to resist such tyranny so rare is it in this world. Let the Inspector while away the time eating cakes. What if business is a bit neglected?

The police had been in great form these last few days arresting now this one, now that. Each day some innocent person or other would be brought along to enliven the assembly in my office−room. One more such unfortunate, I supposed, must have been brought in that day. But why should the Inspector alone be regaled with cakes? That would not do at all. I thumped vigorously on the door.

"If you are going mad, be quick and pour some water over your head that will keep you cool," said my sister−in−law from the passage.

"Send down cakes for two," I shouted. "The person who has been brought in as the thief probably deserves them better. Tell the man to give him a good big helping."

I hurried through my bath. When I came out, I found Bimal sitting on the floor outside. [30] Could this be my Bimal of old, my proud, sensitive Bimal?

What favour could she be wanting to beg, seated like this at my door?

As I stopped short, she stood up and said gently with downcast eyes: "I would have a word with you."

"Come inside then," I said.

"But are you going out on any particular business?"

"I was, but let that be. I want to hear . . ."

"No, finish your business first. We will have our talk after you have had your dinner."

I went off to my sitting−room, to find the Police Inspector's plate quite empty. The person he had brought with him, however, was still busy eating.

"Hullo!" I ejaculated in surprise. "You, Amulya?"

"It is I, sir," said Amulya with his mouth full of cake. "I've had quite a feast. And if you don't mind, I'll take the rest with me." With this he proceeded to tie up the remaining cakes in his handkerchief.

"What does this mean?" I asked, staring at the Inspector.

The man laughed. "We are no nearer, sir," he said, "to solving the problem of the thief: meanwhile the mystery of the theft deepens." He then produced something tied up in a rag, which when untied disclosed a bundle of currency notes. "This, Maharaja," said the Inspector, "is your six thousand rupees!"

"Where was it found?"

"In Amulya Babu's hands. He went last evening to the manager of your Chakna sub−office to tell him that the money had been found. The manager seemed to be in a greater state of trepidation at the recovery than he had

been at the robbery. He was afraid he would be suspected of having made away with the notes and of now making up a cock−and−bull story for fear of being found out. He asked Amulya to wait, on the pretext of getting him some refreshment, and came straight over to the Police Office. I rode off at once, kept Amulya with me, and have been busy with him the whole morning. He refuses to tell us where he got the money from. I warned him he would be kept under restraint till he did so. In that case, he informed me he would have to lie. Very well, I said, he might do so if he pleased. Then he stated that he had found the money under a bush. I pointed out to him that it was not quite so easy to lie as all that. Under what bush? Where was the place? Why was he there? All this would have to be stated as well. 'Don't you worry,' he said, 'there is plenty of time to invent all that.'"

"But, Inspector," I said, "why are you badgering a respectable young gentleman like Amulya Babu?"

"I have no desire to harass him," said the Inspector. "He is not only a gentleman, but the son of Nibaran Babu, my school−fellow. Let me tell you, Maharaja, exactly what must have happened. Amulya knows the thief, but wants to shield him by drawing suspicion on himself. That is just the sort of bravado he loves to indulge in." The Inspector turned to Amulya. "Look here, young man," he continued, "I also was eighteen once upon a time, and a student in the Ripon College. I nearly got into gaol trying to rescue a hack driver from a police constable. It was a near shave." Then he turned again to me and said: "Maharaja, the real thief will now probably escape, but I think I can tell you who is at the bottom of it all."

"Who is it, then?" I asked.

"The manager, in collusion with the guard, Kasim."

When the Inspector, having argued out his theory to his own satisfaction, at last departed, I said to Amulya: "If you will tell me who took the money, I promise you no one shall be hurt."

"I did," said he.

"But how can that be? What about the gang of armed men?. . ."

"It was I, by myself, alone!"

What Amulya then told me was indeed extraordinary. The manager had just finished his supper and was on the verandah rinsing out his mouth. The place was somewhat dark. Amulya had a revolver in each pocket, one loaded with blank cartridges, the other with ball. He had a mask over his face. He flashed a bull's−eye lantern in the manager's face and fired a blank shot. The man swooned away. Some of the guards, who were off duty, came running up, but when Amulya fired another blank shot at them they lost no time in taking cover. Then Kasim, who was on duty, came up whirling a quarterstaff. This time Amulya aimed a bullet at his legs, and finding himself hit, Kasim collapsed on the floor. Amulya then made the trembling manager, who had come to his senses, open the safe and deliver up six thousand rupees. Finally, he took one of the estate horses and galloped off a few miles, there let the animal loose, and quietly walked up here, to our place.

"What made you do all this, Amulya?" I asked.

"There was a grave reason, Maharaja," he replied.

"But why, then, did you try to return the money?"

"Let her come, at whose command I did so. In her presence I shall make a clean breast of it."

"And who may 'she' be?"

"My sister, the Chota Rani!"

I sent for Bimala. She came hesitatingly, barefoot, with a white shawl over her head. I had never seen my Bimal like this before. She seemed to have wrapped herself in a morning light.

Amulya prostrated himself in salutation and took the dust of her feet. Then, as he rose, he said: "Your command has been executed, sister. The money is returned."

"You have saved me, my little brother," said Bimal.

"With your image in my mind, I have not uttered a single lie," Amulya continued. "My watchword *Bande Mataram* has been cast away at your feet for good. I have also received my reward, your *prasad* , as soon as I came to the palace."

Bimal looked at him blankly, unable to follow his last words. Amulya brought out his handkerchief, and untying it showed her the cakes put away inside. "I did not eat them all," he said. "I have kept these to eat after you have helped me with your own hands."

I could see that I was not wanted here. I went out of the room. I could only preach and preach, so I mused, and get my effigy burnt for my pains. I had not yet been able to bring back a single soul from the path of death. They who have the power, can do so by a mere sign. My words have not that ineffable meaning. I am not a flame, only a black coal, which has gone out. I can light no lamp. That is what the story of my life shows my row of lamps has remained unlit.

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30. Sitting on the bare floor is a sign of mourning, and so, by association of ideas, of an abject attitude of mind. [Trans.].

XVI

I returned slowly towards the inner apartments. The Bara Rani's room must have been drawing me again. It had become an absolute necessity for me, that day, to feel that this life of mine had been able to strike some real, some responsive chord in some other harp of life. One cannot realize one's own existence by remaining within oneself it has to be sought outside.

As I passed in front of my sister−in−law's room, she came out saying: "I was afraid you would be late again this afternoon. However. I ordered your dinner as soon as I heard you coming. It will be served in a minute."

"Meanwhile," I said; "let me take out that money of yours and have it kept ready to take with us."

As we walked on towards my room she asked me if the Police Inspector had made any report about the robbery. I somehow did not feel inclined to tell her all the details of how that six thousand had come back. "That's just what all the fuss is about," I said evasively.

When I went into my dressing−room and took out my bunch of keys, I did not find the key of the iron safe on the ring. What an absurdly absent−minded fellow I was, to be sure! Only this morning I had been opening so many boxes and things, and never noticed that this key was not there.

"What has happened to your key?" she asked me.

I went on fumbling in this pocket and that, but could give her no answer. I hunted in the same place over and over again. It dawned on both of us that it could not be a case of the key being mislaid. Someone must have taken it off the ring. Who could it be? Who else could have come into this room?

"Don't you worry about it," she said to me. "Get through your dinner first. The Chota Rani must have kept it herself, seeing how absent−minded you are getting."

I was, however, greatly disturbed. It was never Bimal's habit to take any key of mine without telling me about it. Bimal was not present at my meal−time that day: she was busy feasting Amulya in her own room. My sister−in−law wanted to send for her, but I asked her not to do so.

I had just finished my dinner when Bimal came in. I would have preferred not to discuss the matter of the key in the Bara Rani's presence, but as soon as she saw Bimal, she asked her: "Do you know, dear, where the key of the safe is?"

"I have it," was the reply.

"Didn't I say so!" exclaimed my sister−in−law triumphantly. "Our Chota Rani pretends not to care about these robberies, but she takes precautions on the sly, all the same."

The look on Bimal's face made my mind misgive me. "Let the key be, now," I said. "I will take out that money in the evening."

"There you go again, putting it off," said the Bara Rani. "Why not take it out and send it to the treasury while you have it in mind?"

"I have taken it out already," said Bimal.

I was startled.

"Where have you kept it, then?" asked my sister−in−law.

"I have spent it."

"Just listen to her! Whatever did you spend all that money on?"

Bimal made no reply. I asked her nothing further. The Bara Rani seemed about to make some further remark to Bimala, but checked herself. "Well, that is all right, anyway," she said at length, as she looked towards me. "Just what I used to do with my husband's loose cash. I knew it was no use leaving it with him his hundred and one hangers−on would be sure to get hold of it. You are much the same, dear! What a number of ways you men know of getting through money. We can only save it from you by stealing it ourselves! Come along now. Off with you to bed."

The Bara Rani led me to my room, but I hardly knew where I was going. She sat by my bed after I was stretched on it, and smiled at Bimal as she said: "Give me one of your pans, Chotie darling what? You have none! You have become a regular mem−sahib. Then send for some from my room."

"But have you had your dinner yet?" I anxiously enquired.

"Oh long ago," she replied clearly a fib.

She kept on chattering away there at my bedside, on all manner of things. The maid came and told Bimal that her dinner had been served and was getting cold, but she gave no sign of having heard it. "Not had your dinner yet? What nonsense! It's fearfully late." With this the Bara Rani took Bimal away with her.

I could divine that there was some connection between the taking out of this six thousand and the robbing of the other. But I have no curiosity to learn the nature of it. I shall never ask.

Providence leaves our life moulded in the rough its object being that we ourselves should put the finishing touches, shaping it into its final form to our taste. There has always been the hankering within me to express some great idea in the process of giving shape to my life on the lines suggested by the Creator. In this endeavour I have spent all my days. How severely I have curbed my desires, repressed myself at every step, only the Searcher of the Heart knows.

But the difficulty is, that one's life is not solely one's own. He who would create it must do so with the help of his surroundings, or he will fail. So it was my constant dream to draw Bimal to join me in this work of creating myself. I loved her with all my soul; on the strength of that, I could not but succeed in winning her to my purpose that was my firm belief.

Then I discovered that those who could simply and naturally draw their environment into the process of their self−creation belonged to one species of the genus "man", and I to another. I had received the vital spark, but could not impart it. Those to whom I have surrendered my all have taken my all, but not myself with it.

My trial is hard indeed. Just when I want a helpmate most, I am thrown back on myself alone. Nevertheless, I record my vow that even in this trial I shall win through. Alone, then, shall I tread my thorny path to the end of this life's journey . . .

I have begun to suspect that there has all along been a vein of tyranny in me. There was a despotism in my desire to mould my relations with Bimala in a hard, clear−cut, perfect form. But man's life was not meant to be cast in a mould. And if we try to shape the good, as so much mere material, it takes a terrible revenge by losing its life.

I did not realize all this while that it must have been this unconscious tyranny of mine which made us gradually drift apart. Bimala's life, not finding its true level by reason of my pressure from above, has had to find an outlet by undermining its banks at the bottom. She has had to steal this six thousand rupees because she could not be open with me, because she felt that, in certain things, I despotically differed from her.

Men, such as I, possessed with one idea, are indeed at one with those who can manage to agree with us; but those who do not, can only get on with us by cheating us. It is our unyielding obstinacy, which drives even the simplest to tortuous ways. In trying to manufacture a helpmate, we spoil a wife.

Could I not go back to the beginning? Then, indeed, I should follow the path of the simple. I should not try to fetter my life's companion with my ideas, but play the joyous pipes of my love and say: "Do you love me? Then may you grow true to yourself in the light of your love. Let my suggestions be suppressed, let God's design, which is in you, triumph, and my ideas retire abashed."

But can even Nature's nursing heal the open wound, into which our accumulated differences have broken out? The covering veil, beneath the privacy of which Nature's silent forces alone can work, has been torn asunder. Wounds must be bandaged can we not bandage our wound with our love, so that the day may come when its scar will no longer be visible? It is not too late? So much time has been lost in misunderstanding; it

has taken right up to now to come to an understanding; how much more time will it take for the correcting? What if the wound does eventually heal? can the devastation it has wrought ever be made good?

There was a slight sound near the door. As I turned over I saw Bimala's retreating figure through the open doorway. She must have been waiting by the door, hesitating whether to come in or not, and at last have decided to go back. I jumped up and bounded to the door, calling: "Bimal."

She stopped on her way. She had her back to me. I went and took her by the hand and led her into our room. She threw herself face downwards on a pillow, and sobbed and sobbed. I said nothing, but held her hand as I sat by her head.

When her storm of grief had abated she sat up. I tried to draw her to my breast, but she pushed my arms away and knelt at my feet, touching them repeatedly with her head, in obeisance. I hastily drew my feet back, but she clasped them in her arms, saying in a choking voice: "No, no, no, you must not take away your feet. Let me do my worship."

I kept still. Who was I to stop her? Was I the god of her worship that I should have any qualms?

Bimala's Story

XXIII

Come, come! Now is the time to set sail towards that great confluence, where the river of love meets the sea of worship. In that pure blue all the weight of its muddiness sinks and disappears.

I now fear nothing neither myself, nor anybody else. I have passed through fire. What was inflammable has been burnt to ashes; what is left is deathless. I have dedicated myself to the feet of him, who has received all my sin into the depths of his own pain.

Tonight we go to Calcutta. My inward troubles have so long prevented my looking after my things. Now let me arrange and pack them.

After a while I found my husband had come in and was taking a hand in the packing.

"This won't do," I said. "Did you not promise me you would have a sleep?"

"I might have made the promise," he replied, "but my sleep did not, and it was nowhere to be found."

"No, no," I repeated, "this will never do. Lie down for a while, at least."

"But how can you get through all this alone?"

"Of course I can."

"Well, you may boast of being able to do without me. But frankly I can't do without you. Even sleep refused to come to me, alone, in that room." Then he set to work again.

But there was an interruption, in the shape of a servant, who came and said that Sandip Babu had called and had asked to be announced. I did not dare to ask whom he wanted. The light of the sky seemed suddenly to be shut down, like the leaves of a sensitive plant.

"Come, Bimal," said my husband. "Let us go and hear what Sandip has to tell us. Since he has come back again, after taking his leave, he must have something special to say."

I went, simply because it would have been still more embarrassing to stay. Sandip was staring at a picture on the wall. As we entered he said: "You must be wondering why the fellow has returned. But you know the ghost is never laid till all the rites are complete." With these words he brought out of his pocket something tied in his handkerchief, and laying it on the table, undid the knot. It was those sovereigns.

"Don't you mistake me, Nikhil," he said. "You must not imagine that the contagion of your company has suddenly turned me honest; I am not the man to come back in slobbering repentance to return ill−gotten money. But. . ."

He left his speech unfinished. After a pause he turned towards Nikhil, but said to me: "After all these days, Queen Bee, the ghost of compunction has found an entry into my hitherto untroubled conscience. As I have to wrestle with it every night, after my first sleep is over, I cannot call it a phantom of my imagination. There is no escape even for me till its debt is paid. Into the hands of that spirit, therefore, let me make restitution. Goddess! From you, alone, of all the world, I shall not be able to take away anything. I shall not be rid of you till I am destitute. Take these back!"

He took out at the same time the jewel−casket from under his tunic and put it down, and then left us with hasty steps.

"Listen to me, Sandip," my husband called after him.

"I have not the time, Nikhil," said Sandip as he paused near the door. "The Mussulmans, I am told, have taken me for an invaluable gem, and are conspiring to loot me and hide me away in their graveyard. But I feel that it is necessary that I should live. I have just twenty−five minutes to catch the North−bound train. So, for the present, I must be gone. We shall have our talk out at the next convenient opportunity. lf you take my advice, don't you delay in getting away either. I salute you, Queen Bee, Queen of the bleeding hearts, Queen of desolation!"

Sandip then left almost at a run. I stood stock−still; I had never realized in such a manner before, how trivial, how paltry, this gold and these jewels were. Only a short while ago I was so busy thinking what I should take with me, and how I should pack it. Now I felt that there was no need to take anything at all. To set out and go forth was the important thing.

My husband left his seat and came up and took me by the hand. "It is getting late," he said. "There is not much time left to complete our preparations for the journey."

At this point Chandranath Babu suddenly came in. Finding us both together, he fell back for a moment. Then he said, "Forgive me, my little mother, if I intrude. Nikhil, the Mussulmans are out of hand. They are looting Harish Kundu's treasury. That does not so much matter. But what is intolerable is the violence that is being done to the women of their house."

"I am off," said my husband.

"What can you do there?" I pleaded, as I held him by the hand. "Oh, sir," I appealed to his master. "Will you not tell him not to go?"

"My little mother," he replied, "there is no time to do anything else."

"Don't be alarmed, Bimal," said my husband, as he left us.

When I went to the window I saw my husband galloping away on horseback, with not a weapon in his hands.

In another minute the Bara Rani came running in. "What have you done, Chotie darling," she cried. "How could you let him go?"

"Call the Dewan at once," she said, turning to a servant.

The Ranis never appeared before the Dewan, but the Bara Rani had no thought that day for appearances.

"Send a mounted man to bring back the Maharaja at once," she said, as soon as the Dewan came up.

"We have all entreated him to stay, Rani Mother," said the Dewan, "but he refused to turn back."

"Send word to him that the Bara Rani is ill, that she is on her death−bed," cried my sister−in−law wildly.

When the Dewan had left she turned on me with a furious outburst. "Oh, you witch, you ogress, you could not die yourself, but needs must send him to his death! . . ."

The light of the day began to fade. The sun set behind the feathery foliage of the blossoming *Sajna* tree. I can see every different shade of that sunset even today. Two masses of cloud on either side of the sinking orb made it look like a great bird with fiery−feathered wings outspread. It seemed to me that this fateful day was taking its flight, to cross the ocean of night.

It became darker and darker. Like the flames of a distant village on fire, leaping up every now and then above the horizon, a distant din swelled up in recurring waves into the darkness.

The bells of the evening worship rang out from our temple. I knew the Bara Rani was sitting there, with palms joined in silent prayer. But I could not move a step from the window.

The roads, the village beyond, and the still more distant fringe of trees, grew more and more vague. The lake in our grounds looked up into the sky with a dull lustre, like a blind man's eye. On the left the tower seemed to be craning its neck to catch sight of something that was happening.

The sounds of night take on all manner of disguises. A twig snaps, and one thinks that somebody is running for his life. A door slams, and one feels it to be the sudden heart−thump of a startled world.

Lights would suddenly flicker under the shade of the distant trees, and then go out again. Horses' hoofs would clatter, now and again, only to turn out to be riders leaving the palace gates.

I continually had the feeling that, if only I could die, all this turmoil would come to an end. So long as I was alive my sins would remain rampant, scattering destruction on every side. I remembered the pistol in my box. But my feet refused to leave the window in quest of it. Was I not awaiting my fate?

The gong of the watch solemnly struck ten. A little later, groups of lights appeared in the distance and a great crowd wound its way, like some great serpent, along the roads in the darkness, towards the palace gates.

The Dewan rushed to the gate at the sound. Just then a rider came galloping in. "What's the news, Jata?" asked the Dewan.

"Not good," was the reply.

I could hear these words distinctly from my window. But something was next whispered which I could not catch.

Then came a palanquin, followed by a litter. The doctor was walking alongside the palanquin.

"What do you think, doctor?" asked the Dewan.

"Can't say yet," the doctor replied. "The wound in the head is a serious one."

"And Amulya Babu?"

"He has a bullet through the heart. He is done for."

The Home and the World

R. Tagore

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The Home and the World

R. Tagore

Translated by Surendranath Tagore

Chapter One. Bimala's Story

I

MOTHER, today there comes back to mind the vermilion mark [1] at the parting of your hair, the *sari* [2] which you used to wear, with its wide red border, and those wonderful eyes of yours, full of depth and peace. They came at the start of my life's journey, like the first streak of dawn, giving me golden provision to carry me on my way.

The sky which gives light is blue, and my mother's face was dark, but she had the radiance of holiness, and her beauty would put to shame all the vanity of the beautiful.

Everyone says that I resemble my mother. In my childhood I used to resent this. It made me angry with my mirror. I thought that it was God's unfairness which was wrapped round my limbs that my dark features were not my due, but had come to me by some misunderstanding. All that remained for me to ask of my God in reparation was, that I might grow up to be a model of what woman should be, as one reads it in some epic poem.

When the proposal came for my marriage, an astrologer was sent, who consulted my palm and said, "This girl has good signs. She will become an ideal wife."

And all the women who heard it said: "No wonder, for she resembles her mother."

I was married into a Rajah's house. When I was a child, I was quite familiar with the description of the Prince of the fairy story. But my husband's face was not of a kind that one's imagination would place in fairyland. It was dark, even as mine was. The feeling of shrinking, which I had about my own lack of physical beauty, was lifted a little; at the same time a touch of regret was left lingering in my heart.

But when the physical appearance evades the scrutiny of our senses and enters the sanctuary of our hearts, then it can forget itself. I know, from my childhood's experience, how devotion is beauty itself, in its inner aspect. When my mother arranged the different fruits, carefully peeled by her own loving hands, on the white stone plate, and gently waved her fan to drive away the flies while my father sat down to his meals, her service would lose itself in a beauty which passed beyond outward forms. Even in my infancy I could feel its power. It transcended all debates, or doubts, or calculations: it was pure music.

I distinctly remember after my marriage, when, early in the morning, I would cautiously and silently get up and take the dust [3] of my husband's feet without waking him, how at such moments I could feel the vermilion mark upon my forehead shining out like the morning star.

One day, he happened to awake, and smiled as he asked me: "What is that, Bimala? What *are* you doing?"

I can never forget the shame of being detected by him. He might possibly have thought that I was trying to earn merit secretly. But no, no! That had nothing to do with merit. It was my woman's heart, which must worship in order to love.

My father−in−law's house was old in dignity from the days of the *Badshahs*. Some of its manners were of the Moguls and Pathans, some of its customs of Manu and Parashar. But my husband was absolutely modern. He was the first of the house to go through a college course and take his M.A. degree. His elder brother had died young, of drink, and had left no children. My husband did not drink and was not given to dissipation. So foreign to the family was this abstinence, that to many it hardly seemed decent! Purity, they imagined, was only becoming in those on whom fortune had not smiled. It is the moon which has room for stains, not the stars.

My husband's parents had died long ago, and his old grandmother was mistress of the house. My husband was the apple of her eye, the jewel on her bosom. And so he never met with much difficulty in overstepping any of the ancient usages. When he brought in Miss Gilby, to teach me and be my companion, he stuck to his resolve in spite of the poison secreted by all the wagging tongues at home and outside.

My husband had then just got through his B.A. examination and was reading for his M.A. degree; so he had to stay in Calcutta to attend college. He used to write to me almost every day, a few lines only, and simple words, but his bold, round handwriting would look up into my face, oh, so tenderly! I kept his letters in a sandalwood box and covered them every day with the flowers I gathered in the garden.

At that time the Prince of the fairy tale had faded, like the moon in the morning light. I had the Prince of my real world enthroned in my heart. I was his queen. I had my seat by his side. But my real joy was, that my true place was at his feet.

Since then, I have been educated, and introduced to the modern age in its own language, and therefore these words that I write seem to blush with shame in their prose setting. Except for my acquaintance with this modern standard of life, I should know, quite naturally, that just as my being born a woman was not in my own hands, so the element of devotion in woman's love is not like a hackneyed passage quoted from a romantic poem to be piously written down in round hand in a school−girl's copy−book.

But my husband would not give me any opportunity for worship. That was his greatness. They are cowards who claim absolute devotion from their wives as their right; that is a humiliation for both.

His love for me seemed to overflow my limits by its flood of wealth and service. But my necessity was more for giving than for receiving; for love is a vagabond, who can make his flowers bloom in the wayside dust, better than in the crystal jars kept in the drawing−room.

My husband could not break completely with the old−time traditions which prevailed in our family. It was difficult, therefore, for us to meet at any hour of the day we pleased. [4] I knew exactly the time that he could come to me, and therefore our meeting had all the care of loving preparation. It was like the rhyming of a poem; it had to come through the path of the metre.

After finishing the day's work and taking my afternoon bath, I would do up my hair and renew my vermilion mark and put on my *sari*, carefully crinkled; and then, bringing back my body and mind from all distractions of household duties, I would dedicate it at this special hour, with special ceremonies, to one individual. That time, each day, with him was short; but it was infinite.

My husband used to say, that man and wife are equal in love because of their equal claim on each other. I never argued the point with him, but my heart said that devotion never stands in the way of true equality; it only raises the level of the ground of meeting. Therefore the joy of the higher equality remains permanent; it never slides down to the vulgar level of triviality.

My beloved, it was worthy of you that you never expected worship from me. But if you had accepted it, you would have done me a real service. You showed your love by decorating me, by educating me, by giving me what I asked for, and what I did not. I have seen what depth of love there was in your eyes when you gazed at me. I have known the secret sigh of pain you suppressed in your love for me. You loved my body as if it were a flower of paradise. You loved my whole nature as if it had been given you by some rare providence.

Such lavish devotion made me proud to think that the wealth was all my own which drove you to my gate. But vanity such as this only checks the flow of free surrender in a woman's love. When I sit on the queen's throne and claim homage, then the claim only goes on magnifying itself; it is never satisfied. Can there be any real happiness for a woman in merely feeling that she has power over a man? To surrender one's pride in devotion is woman's only salvation.

It comes back to me today how, in the days of our happiness, the fires of envy sprung up all around us. That was only natural, for had I not stepped into my good fortune by a mere chance, and without deserving it? But providence does not allow a run of luck to last for ever, unless its debt of honour be fully paid, day by day, through many a long day, and thus made secure. God may grant us gifts, but the merit of being able to take and hold them must be our own. Alas for the boons that slip through unworthy hands!

My husband's grandmother and mother were both renowned for their beauty. And my widowed sister−in−law

was also of a beauty rarely to be seen. When, in turn, fate left them desolate, the grandmother vowed she would not insist on having beauty for her remaining grandson when he married. Only the auspicious marks with which I was endowed gained me an entry into this family otherwise, I had no claim to be here.

In this house of luxury, but few of its ladies had received their meed of respect. They had, however, got used to the ways of the family, and managed to keep their heads above water, buoyed up by their dignity as *Ranis* of an ancient house, in spite of their daily tears being drowned in the foam of wine, and by the tinkle of the dancing girls" anklets. Was the credit due to me that my husband did not touch liquor, nor squander his manhood in the markets of woman's flesh? What charm did I know to soothe the wild and wandering mind of men? It was my good luck, nothing else. For fate proved utterly callous to my sister−in−law. Her festivity died out, while yet the evening was early, leaving the light of her beauty shining in vain over empty halls burning and burning, with no accompanying music!

His sister−in−law affected a contempt for my husband's modern notions. How absurd to keep the family ship, laden with all the weight of its time−honoured glory, sailing under the colours of his slip of a girl−wife alone! Often have I felt the lash of scorn. "A thief who had stolen a husband's love!" "A sham hidden in the shamelessness of her new−fangled finery!" The many−coloured garments of modern fashion with which my husband loved to adorn me roused jealous wrath. "Is not she ashamed to make a show−window of herself and with her looks, too!"

My husband was aware of all this, but his gentleness knew no bounds. He used to implore me to forgive her.

I remember I once told him: "Women's minds are so petty. so crooked!" "Like the feet of Chinese women," he replied. "Has not the pressure of society cramped them into pettiness and crookedness? They are but pawns of the fate which gambles with them. What responsibility have they of their own?"

My sister−in−law never failed to get from my husband whatever she wanted. He did not stop to consider whether her requests were right or reasonable. But what exasperated me most was that she was not grateful for this. I had promised my husband that I would not talk back at her, but this set me raging all the more, inwardly. I used to feel that goodness has a limit, which, if passed, somehow seems to make men cowardly. Shall I tell the whole truth? I have often wished that my husband had the manliness to be a little less good.

My sister−in−law, the Bara Rani, [5] was still young and had no pretensions to saintliness. Rather, her talk and jest and laugh inclined to be forward. The young maids with whom she surrounded herself were also impudent to a degree. But there was none to gainsay her for was not this the custom of the house? It seemed to me that my good fortune in having a stainless husband was a special eyesore to her. He, however, felt more the sorrow of her lot than the defects of her character.

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1. The mark of Hindu wifehood and the symbol of all the devotion that it implies.

2. The *sari* is the dress of the Hindu woman.

3. Taking the dust of the feet is a formal offering of reverence and is done by lightly touching the feet of the revered one and then one's own head with the same hand. The wife does not ordinarily do this to the husband.

4. It would not be reckoned good form for the husband to be continually going into the zenana, except at particular hours for meals or rest.

5. *Bara* = Senior; *Chota* = Junior. In joint families of rank, though the widows remain entitled only to a

life−interest in their husbands' share, their rank remains to them according to seniority, and the titles "Senior" and "Junior" continue to distinguish the elder and younger branches, even though the junior branch be the one in power.

II

My husband was very eager to take me out of *purdah*. [6]

One day I said to him: "What do I want with the outside world?"

"The outside world may want you," he replied.

"If the outside world has got on so long without me, it may go on for some time longer. It need not pine to death for want of me."

"Let it perish, for all I care! That is not troubling me. I am thinking about myself."

"Oh, indeed. Tell me what about yourself?"

My husband was silent, with a smile.

I knew his way, and protested at once: "No, no, you are not going to run away from me like that! I want to have this out with you."

"Can one ever finish a subject with words?"

"Do stop speaking in riddles. Tell me. . ."

"What I want is, that I should have you, and you should have me, more fully in the outside world. That is where we are still in debt to each other."

"Is anything wanting, then, in the love we have here at home?"

"Here you are wrapped up in me. You know neither what you have, nor what you want."

"I cannot bear to hear you talk like this."

"I would have you come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality. Merely going on with your household duties, living all your life in the world of household conventions and the drudgery of household tasks you were not made for that! If we meet, and recognize each other, in the real world, then only will our love be true."

"If there be any drawback here to our full recognition of each other, then I have nothing to say. But as for myself, I feel no want."

"Well, even if the drawback is only on my side, why shouldn't you help to remove it?"

Such discussions repeatedly occurred. One day he said: "The greedy man who is fond of his fish stew has no compunction in cutting up the fish according to his need. But the man who loves the fish wants to enjoy it in the water; and if that is impossible he waits on the bank; and even if he comes back home without a sight of it he has the consolation of knowing that the fish is all right. Perfect gain is the best of all; but if that is

impossible, then the next best gain is perfect losing.

I never liked the way my husband had of talking on this subject, but that is not the reason why I refused to leave the zenana. His grandmother was still alive. My husband had filled more than a hundred and twenty per cent of the house with the twentieth century, against her taste; but she had borne it uncomplaining. She would have borne it, likewise, if the daughter−in−law [7] of the Rajah's house had left its seclusion. She was even prepared for this happening. But I did not consider it important enough to give her the pain of it. I have read in books that we are called "caged birds". I cannot speak for others, but I had so much in this cage of mine that there was not room for it in the universe at least that is what I then felt.

The grandmother, in her old age, was very fond of me. At the bottom of her fondness was the thought that, with the conspiracy of favourable stars which attended me, I had been able to attract my husband's love. Were not men naturally inclined to plunge downwards? None of the others, for all their beauty, had been able to prevent their husbands going headlong into the burning depths which consumed and destroyed them. She believed that I had been the means of extinguishing this fire, so deadly to the men of the family. So she kept me in the shelter of her bosom, and trembled if I was in the least bit unwell.

His grandmother did not like the dresses and ornaments my husband brought from European shops to deck me with. But she reflected: "Men will have some absurd hobby or other, which is sure to be expensive. It is no use trying to check their extravagance; one is glad enough if they stop short of ruin. If my Nikhil had not been busy dressing up his wife there is no knowing whom else he might have spent his money on!" So whenever any new dress of mine arrived she used to send for my husband and make merry over it.

Thus it came about that it was her taste which changed. The influence of the modern age fell so strongly upon her, that her evenings refused to pass if I did not tell her stories out of English books.

After his grandmother's death, my husband wanted me to go and live with him in Calcutta. But I could not bring myself to do that. Was not this our House, which she had kept under her sheltering care through all her trials and troubles? Would not a curse come upon me if I deserted it and went off to town? This was the thought that kept me back, as her empty seat reproachfully looked up at me. That noble lady had come into this house at the age of eight, and had died in her seventy−ninth year. She had not spent a happy life. Fate had hurled shaft after shaft at her breast, only to draw out more and more the imperishable spirit within. This great house was hallowed with her tears. What should I do in the dust of Calcutta, away from it?

My husband's idea was that this would be a good opportunity for leaving to my sister−in−law the consolation of ruling over the household, giving our life, at the same time, more room to branch out in Calcutta. That is just where my difficulty came in. She had worried my life out, she ill brooked my husband's happiness, and for this she was to be rewarded! And what of the day when we should have to come back here? Should I then get back my seat at the head?

"What do you want with that seat?" my husband would say. "Are there not more precious things in life?"

Men never understand these things. They have their nests in the outside world; they little know the whole of what the household stands for. In these matters they ought to follow womanly guidance. Such were my thoughts at that time.

I felt the real point was, that one ought to stand up for one's rights. To go away, and leave everything in the hands of the enemy, would be nothing short of owning defeat.

But why did not my husband compel me to go with him to Calcutta? I know the reason. He did not use his power, just because he had it.

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6. The seclusion of the zenana, and all the customs peculiar to it, are designated by the general term "Purdah", which means Screen.

7. The prestige of the daughter−in−law is of the first importance in a Hindu household of rank [Trans.].

III

IF one had to fill in, little by little, the gap between day and night, it would take an eternity to do it. But the sun rises and the darkness is dispelled a moment is sufficient to overcome an infinite distance.

One day there came the new era of *Swadeshi* [8] in Bengal; but as to how it happened, we had no distinct vision. There was no gradual slope connecting the past with the present. For that reason, I imagine, the new epoch came in like a flood, breaking down the dykes and sweeping all our prudence and fear before it. We had no time even to think about, or understand, what had happened, or what was about to happen.

My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age. Though, up to this time, the walls of the home which was the ultimate world to my mind remained unbroken, yet I stood looking over into the distance, and I heard a voice from the far horizon, whose meaning was not perfectly clear to me, but whose call went straight to my heart.

From the time my husband had been a college student he had been trying to get the things required by our people produced in our own country. There are plenty of date trees in our district. He tried to invent an apparatus for extracting the juice and boiling it into sugar and treacle. I heard that it was a great success, only it extracted more money than juice. After a while he came to the conclusion that our attempts at reviving our industries were not succeeding for want of a bank of our own. He was, at the time, trying to teach me political economy. This alone would not have done much harm, but he also took it into his head to teach his countrymen ideas of thrift, so as to pave the way for a bank; and then he actually started a small bank. Its high rate of interest, which made the villagers flock so enthusiastically to put in their money, ended by swamping the bank altogether.

The old officers of the estate felt troubled and frightened. There was jubilation in the enemy's camp. Of all the family, only my husband's grandmother remained unmoved. She would scold me, saying: "Why are you all plaguing him so? Is it the fate of the estate that is worrying you? How many times have I seen this estate in the hands of the court receiver! Are men like women? Men are born spendthrifts and only know how to waste. Look here, child, count yourself fortunate that your husband is not wasting himself as well!"

My husband's list of charities was a long one. He would assist to the bitter end of utter failure anyone who wanted to invent a new loom or rice−husking machine. But what annoyed me most was the way that Sandip Babu [9] used to fleece him on the pretext of *Swadeshi* work. Whenever he wanted to start a newspaper, or travel about preaching the Cause, or take a change of air by the advice of his doctor, my husband would unquestioningly supply him with the money. This was over and above the regular living allowance which Sandip Babu also received from him. The strangest part of it was that my husband and Sandip Babu did not agree in their opinions.

As soon as the *Swadeshi* storm reached my blood, I said to my husband: "I must burn all my foreign clothes."

"Why burn them?" said he. "You need not wear them as long as you please."

"As long as I please! Not in this life . . ."

"Very well, do not wear them for the rest of your life, then. But why this bonfire business?"

"Would you thwart me in my resolve?"

"What I want to say is this: Why not try to build up something? You should not waste even a tenth part of your energies in this destructive excitement."

"Such excitement will give us the energy to build."

"That is as much as to say, that you cannot light the house unless you set fire to it."

Then there came another trouble. When Miss Gilby first came to our house there was a great flutter, which afterwards calmed down when they got used to her. Now the whole thing was stirred up afresh. I had never bothered myself before as to whether Miss Gilby was European or Indian, but I began to do so now. I said to my husband: "We must get rid of Miss Gilby."

He kept silent.

I talked to him wildly, and he went away sad at heart.

After a fit of weeping, I felt in a more reasonable mood when we met at night. "I cannot," my husband said, "look upon Miss Gilby through a mist of abstraction, just because she is English. Cannot you get over the barrier of her name after such a long acquaintance? Cannot you realize that she loves you?"

I felt a little ashamed and replied with some sharpness: "Let her remain. I am not over anxious to send her away." And Miss Gilby remained.

But one day I was told that she had been insulted by a young fellow on her way to church. This was a boy whom we were supporting. My husband turned him out of the house. There was not a single soul, that day, who could forgive my husband for that act not even I. This time Miss Gilby left of her own accord. She shed tears when she came to say good−bye, but my mood would not melt. To slander the poor boy so and such a fine boy, too, who would forget his daily bath and food in his enthusiasm for *Swadeshi*.

My husband escorted Miss Gilby to the railway station in his own carriage. I was sure he was going too far. When exaggerated accounts of the incident gave rise to a public scandal, which found its way to the newspapers, I felt he had been rightly served.

I had often become anxious at my husband's doings, but had never before been ashamed; yet now I had to blush for him! I did not know exactly, nor did I care, what wrong poor Noren might, or might not, have done to Miss Gilby, but the idea of sitting in judgement on such a matter at such a time! I should have refused to damp the spirit which prompted young Noren to defy the Englishwoman. I could not but look upon it as a sign of cowardice in my husband, that he should fail to understand this simple thing. And so I blushed for him.

And yet it was not that my husband refused to support *Swadeshi* , or was in any way against the Cause. Only he had not been able whole−heartedly to accept the spirit of *Bande Mataram*. [10]

"I am willing," he said, "to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it."

8. The Nationalist movement, which began more as an economic than a political one, having as its main object the encouragement of indigenous industries [Trans.].

9. "Babu" is a term of respect, like "Father" or "Mister," but has also meant in colonial days a person who understands some English. [on−line ed.]

10. Lit.: "Hail Mother"; the opening words of a song by Bankim Chatterjee, the famous Bengali novelist. The song has now become the national anthem, and *Bande Mataram* the national cry, since the days of the *Swadeshi* movement [Trans.].

Chapter Two

Bimala's Story

IV

THIS was the time when Sandip Babu with his followers came to our neighbourhood to preach *Swadeshi*.

There is to be a big meeting in our temple pavilion. We women are sitting there, on one side, behind a screen. Triumphant shouts of *Bande Mataram* come nearer: and to them I am thrilling through and through. Suddenly a stream of barefooted youths in turbans, clad in ascetic ochre, rushes into the quadrangle, like a silt−reddened freshet into a dry river−bed at the first burst of the rains. The whole place is filled with an immense crowd, through which Sandip Babu is borne, seated in a big chair hoisted on the shoulders of ten or twelve of the youths.

Bande Mataram! *Bande Mataram*! *Bande Mataram*! It seems as though the skies would be rent and scattered into a thousand fragments.

I had seen Sandip Babu's photograph before. There was something in his features which I did not quite like. Not that he was bad−looking far from it: he had a splendidly handsome face. Yet, I know not why, it seemed to me, in spite of all its brilliance, that too much of base alloy had gone into its making. The light in his eyes somehow did not shine true. That was why I did not like it when my husband unquestioningly gave in to all his demands. I could bear the waste of money; but it vexed me to think that he was imposing on my husband, taking advantage of friendship. His bearing was not that of an ascetic, nor even of a person of moderate means, but foppish all over. Love of comfort seemed to . . . any number of such reflections come back to me today, but let them be.

When, however, Sandip Babu began to speak that afternoon, and the hearts of the crowd swayed and surged to his words, as though they would break all bounds, I saw him wonderfully transformed. Especially when his features were suddenly lit up by a shaft of light from the slowly setting sun, as it sunk below the roof−line of the pavilion, he seemed to me to be marked out by the gods as their messenger to mortal men and women.

From beginning to end of his speech, each one of his utterances was a stormy outburst. There was no limit to the confidence of his assurance. I do not know how it happened, but I found I had impatiently pushed away the screen from before me and had fixed my gaze upon him. Yet there was none in that crowd who paid any heed to my doings. Only once, I noticed, his eyes, like stars in fateful Orion, flashed full on my face.

I was utterly unconscious of myself. I was no longer the lady of the Rajah's house, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood. And he was the champion of Bengal. As the sky had shed its light over him, so he must receive the consecration of a woman's benediction . . .

It seemed clear to me that, since he had caught sight of me, the fire in his words had flamed up more fiercely. Indra's [11] steed refused to be reined in, and there came the roar of thunder and the flash of lightning. I said within myself that his language had caught fire from my eyes; for we women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself.

I returned home that evening radiant with a new pride and joy. The storm within me had shifted my whole being from one centre to another. Like the Greek maidens of old, I fain would cut off my long, resplendent tresses to make a bowstring for my hero. Had my outward ornaments been connected with my inner feelings, then my necklet, my armlets, my bracelets, would all have burst their bonds and flung themselves over that assembly like a shower of meteors. Only some personal sacrifice, I felt, could help me to bear the tumult of my exaltation.

When my husband came home later, I was trembling lest he should utter a sound out of tune with the triumphant paean which was still ringing in my ears, lest his fanaticism for truth should lead him to express disapproval of anything that had been said that afternoon. For then I should have openly defied and humiliated him. But he did not say a word . . . which I did not like either.

He should have said: "Sandip has brought me to my senses. I now realize how mistaken I have been all this time."

I somehow felt that he was spitefully silent, that he obstinately refused to be enthusiastic. I asked how long Sandip Babu was going to be with us.

"He is off to Rangpur early tomorrow morning," said my husband.

"Must it be tomorrow?"

"Yes, he is already engaged to speak there."

I was silent for a while and then asked again: "Could he not possibly stay a day longer?"

"That may hardly be possible, but why?"

"I want to invite him to dinner and attend on him myself."

My husband was surprised. He had often entreated me to be present when he had particular friends to dinner, but I had never let myself be persuaded. He gazed at me curiously, in silence, with a look I did not quite understand.

I was suddenly overcome with a sense of shame. "No, no," I exclaimed, "that would never do!"

"Why not!" said he. "I will ask him myself, and if it is at all possible he will surely stay on for tomorrow."

It turned out to be quite possible.

I will tell the exact truth. That day I reproached my Creator because he had not made me surpassingly beautiful not to steal any heart away, but because beauty is glory. In this great day the men of the country should realize its goddess in its womanhood. But, alas, the eyes of men fail to discern the goddess, if outward beauty be lacking. Would Sandip Babu find the *Shakti* of the Motherland manifest in me? Or would he simply take me to be an ordinary, domestic woman?

That morning I scented my flowing hair and tied it in a loose knot, bound by a cunningly intertwined red silk ribbon. Dinner, you see, was to be served at midday, and there was no time to dry my hair after my bath and do it up plaited in the ordinary way. I put on a gold−bordered white *sari*, and my short−sleeve muslin jacket was also gold−bordered.

I felt that there was a certain restraint about my costume and that nothing could well have been simpler. But my sister−in−law, who happened to be passing by, stopped dead before me, surveyed me from head to foot and with compressed lips smiled a meaning smile. When I asked her the reason, "I am admiring your get−up!" she said.

"What is there so entertaining about it?" I enquired, considerably annoyed.

"It's superb," she said. "I was only thinking that one of those low−necked English bodices would have made it perfect." Not only her mouth and eyes, but her whole body seemed to ripple with suppressed laughter as she left the room.

I was very, very angry, and wanted to change everything and put on my everyday clothes. But I cannot tell exactly why I could not carry out my impulse. Women are the ornaments of society thus I reasoned with myself and my husband would never like it, if I appeared before Sandip Babu unworthily clad.

My idea had been to make my appearance after they had sat down to dinner. In the bustle of looking after the serving the first awkwardness would have passed off. But dinner was not ready in time, and it was getting late. Meanwhile my husband had sent for me to introduce the guest.

I was feeling horribly shy about looking Sandip Babu in the face. However, I managed to recover myself enough to say: "I am so sorry dinner is getting late."

He boldly came and sat right beside me as he replied: "I get a dinner of some kind every day, but the Goddess of Plenty keeps behind the scenes. Now that the goddess herself has appeared, it matters little if the dinner lags behind."

He was just as emphatic in his manners as he was in his public speaking. He had no hesitation and seemed to be accustomed to occupy, unchallenged, his chosen seat. He claimed the right to intimacy so confidently, that the blame would seem to belong to those who should dispute it.

I was in terror lest Sandip Babu should take me for a shrinking, old−fashioned bundle of inanity. But, for the life of me, I could not sparkle in repartees such as might charm or dazzle him. What could have possessed me, I angrily wondered, to appear before him in such an absurd way?

I was about to retire when dinner was over, but Sandip Babu, as bold as ever, placed himself in my way.

"You must not," he said, "think me greedy. It was not the dinner that kept me staying on, it was your invitation. If you were to run away now, that would not be playing fair with your guest."

If he had not said these words with a careless ease, they would have been out of tune. But, after all, he was such a great friend of my husband that I was like his sister.

While I was struggling to climb up this high wave of intimacy, my husband came to the rescue, saying: "Why not come back to us after you have taken your dinner?"

"But you must give your word," said Sandip Babu, "before we let you off."

"I will come," said I, with a slight smile.

"Let me tell you," continued Sandip Babu, "why I cannot trust you. Nikhil has been married these nine years, and all this while you have eluded me. If you do this again for another nine years, we shall never meet again."

I took up the spirit of his remark as I dropped my voice to reply: "Why even then should we not meet?"

"My horoscope tells me I am to die early. None of my forefathers have survived their thirtieth year. I am now twenty−seven."

He knew this would go home. This time there must have been a shade of concern in my low voice as I said: "The blessings of the whole country are sure to avert the evil influence of the stars."

"Then the blessings of the country must be voiced by its goddess. This is the reason for my anxiety that you should return, so that my talisman may begin to work from today."

Sandip Babu had such a way of taking things by storm that I got no opportunity of resenting what I never should have permitted in another.

"So," he concluded with a laugh, "I am going to hold this husband of yours as a hostage till you come back."

As I was coming away, he exclaimed: "May I trouble you for a trifle?"

I started and turned round.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "It's merely a glass of water. You might have noticed that I did not drink any water with my dinner. I take it a little later."

Upon this I had to make a show of interest and ask him the reason. He began to give the history of his dyspepsia. I was told how he had been a martyr to it for seven months, and how, after the usual course of nuisances, which included different allopathic and homoeopathic misadventures, he had obtained the most wonderful results by indigenous methods.

"Do you know," he added, with a smile, "God has built even my infirmities in such a manner that they yield only under the bombardment of *Swadeshi* pills."

My husband, at this, broke his silence. "You must confess," said he, "that you have as immense an attraction for foreign medicine as the earth has for meteors. You have three shelves in your sitting−room full of. . ."

Sandip Babu broke in: "Do you know what they are? They are the punitive police. They come, not because they are wanted, but because they are imposed on us by the rule of this modern age, exacting fines and−inflicting injuries."

My husband could not bear exaggerations, and I could see he disliked this. But all ornaments are exaggerations. They are not made by God, but by man. Once I remember in defence of some untruth of mine I said to my husband: "Only the trees and beasts and birds tell unmitigated truths, because these poor things have not the power to invent. In this men show their superiority to the lower creatures, and women beat even men. Neither is a profusion of ornament unbecoming for a woman, nor a profusion of untruth."

As I came out into the passage leading to the zenana I found my sister−in−law, standing near a window overlooking the reception rooms, peeping through the venetian shutter.

"You here?" I asked in surprise.

"Eavesdropping!" she replied.

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11. The Jupiter Pluvius of Hindu mythology.

V

When I returned, Sandip Babu was tenderly apologetic. "I am afraid we have spoilt your appetite," he said.

I felt greatly ashamed. Indeed, I had been too indecently quick over my dinner. With a little calculation, it would become quite evident that my non−eating had surpassed the eating. But I had no idea that anyone could have been deliberately calculating.

I suppose Sandip Babu detected my feeling of shame, which only augmented it. "I was sure," he said, "that you had the impulse of the wild deer to run away, but it is a great boon that you took the trouble to keep your promise with me."

I could not think of any suitable reply and so I sat down, blushing and uncomfortable, at one end of the sofa. The vision that I had of myself, as the *Shakti* of Womanhood, incarnate, crowning Sandip Babu simply with my presence, majestic and unashamed, failed me altogether.

Sandip Babu deliberately started a discussion with my husband. He knew that his keen wit flashed to the best effect in an argument. I have often since observed, that he never lost an opportunity for a passage at arms whenever I happened to be present.

He was familiar with my husband's views on the cult of *Bande Mataram*, and began in a provoking way: "So you do not allow that there is room for an appeal to the imagination in patriotic work?"

"It has its place, Sandip, I admit, but I do not believe in giving it the whole place. I would know my country in its frank reality, and for this I am both afraid and ashamed to make use of hypnotic texts of patriotism."

"What you call hypnotic texts I call truth. I truly believe my country to be my God. I worship Humanity. God manifests Himself both in man and in his country."

"If that is what you really believe, there should be no difference for you between man and man, and so between country and country."

"Quite true. But my powers are limited, so my worship of Humanity is continued in the worship of my country."

"I have nothing against your worship as such, but how is it you propose to conduct your worship of God by hating other countries in which He is equally manifest?"

"Hate is also an adjunct of worship. Arjuna won Mahadeva's favour by wrestling with him. God will be with us in the end, if we are prepared to give Him battle."

"If that be so, then those who are serving and those who are harming the country are both His devotees. Why, then, trouble to preach patriotism?"

"In the case of one's own country, it is different. There the heart clearly demands worship."

"If you push the same argument further you can say that since God is manifested in us, our *self* has to be worshipped before all else; because our natural instinct claims it."

"Look here, Nikhil, this is all merely dry logic. Can't you recognize that there is such a thing as feeling?"

"I tell you the truth, Sandip," my husband replied. "It is my feelings that are outraged, whenever you try to pass off injustice as a duty, and unrighteousness as a moral ideal. The fact, that I am incapable of stealing, is not due to my possessing logical faculties, but to my having some feeling of respect for myself and love for ideals."

I was raging inwardly. At last I could keep silent no longer. "Is not the history of every country," I cried, "whether England, France, Germany, or Russia, the history of stealing for the sake of one's own country?"

"They have to answer for these thefts; they are doing so even now; their history is not yet ended."

"At any rate," interposed Sandip Babu, "why should we not follow suit? Let us first fill our country's coffers with stolen goods and then take centuries, like these other countries, to answer for them, if we must. But, I ask you, where do you find this 'answering' in history?"

"When Rome was answering for her sin no one knew it. All that time, there was apparently no limit to her prosperity. But do you not see one thing: how these political bags of theirs are bursting with lies and treacheries, breaking their backs under their weight?"

Never before had I had any opportunity of being present at a discussion between my husband and his men friends. Whenever he argued with me I could feel his reluctance to push me into a corner. This arose out of the very love he bore me. Today for the first time I saw his fencer's skill in debate.

Nevertheless, my heart refused to accept my husband's position. I was struggling to find some answer, but it would not come. When the word "righteousness" comes into an argument, it sounds ugly to say that a thing can be too good to be useful.

All of a sudden Sandip Babu turned to me with the question: "What do *you* say to this?"

"I do not care about fine distinctions," I broke out. "I will tell you broadly what I feel. I am only human. I am covetous. I would have good things for my country. If I am obliged, I would snatch them and filch them. I have anger. I would be angry for my country's sake. If necessary, I would smite and slay to avenge her insults. I have my desire to be fascinated, and fascination must be supplied to me in bodily shape by my country. She must have some visible symbol casting its spell upon my mind. I would make my country a Person, and call her Mother, Goddess, Durga for whom I would redden the earth with sacrificial offerings. I am human, not divine."

Sandip Babu leapt to his feet with uplifted arms and shouted "Hurrah!" The next moment he corrected himself and cried: "*Bande Mataram*."

A shadow of pain passed over the face of my husband. He said to me in a very gentle voice: "Neither am I divine: I am human. And therefore I dare not permit the evil which is in me to be exaggerated into an image of my country never, never!"

Sandip Babu cried out: "See, Nikhil, how in the heart of a woman Truth takes flesh and blood. Woman knows

how to be cruel: her virulence is like a blind storm. It is beautifully fearful. In man it is ugly, because it harbours in its centre the gnawing worms of reason and thought. I tell you, Nikhil, it is our women who will save the country. This is not the time for nice scruples. We must be unswervingly, unreasoningly brutal. We must sin. We must give our women red sandal paste with which to anoint and enthrone our sin. Don't you remember what the poet says:

> Come, Sin, O beautiful Sin,
> Let thy stinging red kisses pour down fiery red wine into our blood.
> Sound the trumpet of imperious evil
> And cross our forehead with the wreath of exulting lawlessness,
> O Deity of Desecration,
> Smear our breasts with the blackest mud of disrepute, unashamed.

Down with that righteousness, which cannot smilingly bring rack and ruin."

When Sandip Babu, standing with his head high, insulted at a moment's impulse all that men have cherished as their highest, in all countries and in all times, a shiver went right through my body.

But, with a stamp of his foot, he continued his declamation: "I can see that you are that beautiful spirit of fire, which burns the home to ashes and lights up the larger world with its flame. Give to us the indomitable courage to go to the bottom of Ruin itself. Impart grace to all that is baneful."

It was not clear to whom Sandip Babu addressed his last appeal. It might have been She whom he worshipped with his *Bande Mataram*. It might have been the Womanhood of his country. Or it might have been its representative, the woman before him. He would have gone further in the same strain, but my husband suddenly rose from his seat and touched him lightly on the shoulder saying: "Sandip, Chandranath Babu is here."

I started and turned round, to find an aged gentleman at the door, calm and dignified, in doubt as to whether he should come in or retire. His face was touched with a gentle light like that of the setting sun.

My husband came up to me and whispered: "This is my master, of whom I have so often told you. Make your obeisance to him."

I bent reverently and took the dust of his feet. He gave me his blessing saying: "May God protect you always, my little mother." I was sorely in need of such a blessing at that moment.

Nikhil's Story

I

One day I had the faith to believe that I should be able to bear whatever came from my God. I never had the trial. Now I think it has come.

I used to test my strength of mind by imagining all kinds of evil which might happen to me poverty, imprisonment, dishonour, death even Bimala's. And when I said to myself that I should be able to receive these with firmness, I am sure I did not exaggerate. Only I could never even imagine one thing, and today it is that of which I am thinking, and wondering whether I can really bear it. There is a thorn somewhere pricking in my heart, constantly giving me pain while I am about my daily work. It seems to persist even when I am asleep. The very moment I wake up in the morning, I find that the bloom has gone from the face of the sky.

What is it? What has happened?

My mind has become so sensitive, that even my past life, which came to me in the disguise of happiness, seems to wring my very heart with its falsehood; and the shame and sorrow which are coming close to me are losing their cover of privacy, all the more because they try to veil their faces. My heart has become all eyes. The things that should not be seen, the things I do not want to see these I must see.

The day has come at last when my ill−starred life has to reveal its destitution in a long−drawn series of exposures. This penury, all unexpected, has taken its seat in the heart where plenitude seemed to reign. The fees which I paid to delusion for just nine years of my youth have now to be returned with interest to Truth till the end of my days.

What is the use of straining to keep up my pride? What harm if I confess that I have something lacking in me? Possibly it is that unreasoning forcefulness which women love to find in men. But is strength mere display of muscularity? Must strength have no scruples in treading the weak underfoot?

But why all these arguments? Worthiness cannot be earned merely by disputing about it. And I am unworthy, unworthy, unworthy.

What if I am unworthy? The true value of love is this, that it can ever bless the unworthy with its own prodigality. For the worthy there are many rewards on God's earth, but God has specially reserved love for the unworthy.

Up till now Bimala was my home−made Bimala, the product of the confined space and the daily routine of small duties. Did the love which I received from her, I asked myself, come from the deep spring of her heart, or was it merely like the daily provision of pipe water pumped up by the municipal steam−engine of society?

I longed to find Bimala blossoming fully in all her truth and power. But the thing I forgot to calculate was, that one must give up all claims based on conventional rights, if one would find a person freely revealed in truth.

Why did I fail to think of this? Was it because of the husband's pride of possession over his wife? No. It was because I placed the fullest trust upon love. I was vain enough to think that I had the power in me to bear the sight of truth in its awful nakedness. It was tempting Providence, but still I clung to my proud determination to come out victorious in the trial.

Bimala had failed to understand me in one thing. She could not fully realize that I held as weakness all imposition of force. Only the weak dare not be just. They shirk their responsibility of fairness and try quickly to get at results through the short−cuts of injustice. Bimala has no patience with patience. She loves to find in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust. Her respect must have its element of fear.

I had hoped that when Bimala found herself free in the outer world she would be rescued from her infatuation for tyranny. But now I feel sure that this infatuation is deep down in her nature. Her love is for the boisterous. From the tip of her tongue to the pit of her stomach she must tingle with red pepper in order to enjoy the simple fare of life. But my determination was, never to do my duty with frantic impetuosity, helped on by the fiery liquor of excitement. I know Bimala finds it difficult to respect me for this, taking my scruples for feebleness and she is quite angry with me because I am not running amuck crying *Bande Mataram*.

For the matter of that, I have become unpopular with all my countrymen because I have not joined them in their carousals. They are certain that either I have a longing for some title, or else that I am afraid of the police. The police on their side suspect me of harbouring some hidden design and protesting too much in my

mildness.

What I really feel is this, that those who cannot find food for their enthusiasm in a knowledge of their country as it actually is, or those who cannot love men just because they are men who needs must shout and deify their country in order to keep up their excitement these love excitement more than their country.

To try to give our infatuation a higher place than Truth is a sign of inherent slavishness. Where our minds are free we find ourselves lost. Our moribund vitality must have for its rider either some fantasy, or someone in authority, or a sanction from the pundits, in order to make it move. So long as we are impervious to truth and have to be moved by some hypnotic stimulus, we must know that we lack the capacity for self−government. Whatever may be our condition, we shall either need some imaginary ghost or some actual medicine−man to terrorize over us.

The other day when Sandip accused me of lack of imagination, saying that this prevented me from realizing my country in a visible image, Bimala agreed with him. I did not say anything in my defence, because to win in argument does not lead to happiness. Her difference of opinion is not due to any inequality of intelligence, but rather to dissimilarity of nature.

They accuse me of being unimaginative that is, according to them, I may have oil in my lamp, but no flame. Now this is exactly the accusation which I bring against them. I would say to them: "You are dark, even as the flints are. You must come to violent conflicts and make a noise in order to produce your sparks. But their disconnected flashes merely assist your pride, and not your clear vision."

I have been noticing for some time that there is a gross cupidity about Sandip. His fleshly feelings make him harbour delusions about his religion and impel him into a tyrannical attitude in his patriotism. His intellect is keen, but his nature is coarse, and so he glorifies his selfish lusts under high−sounding names. The cheap consolations of hatred are as urgently necessary for him as the satisfaction of his appetites. Bimala has often warned me, in the old days, of his hankering after money. I understood this, but I could not bring myself to haggle with Sandip. I felt ashamed even to own to myself that he was trying to take advantage of me.

It will, however, be difficult to explain to Bimala today that Sandip's love of country is but a different phase of his covetous self−love. Bimala's hero−worship of Sandip makes me hesitate all the more to talk to her about him, lest some touch of jealousy may lead me unwittingly into exaggeration. It may be that the pain at my heart is already making me see a distorted picture of Sandip. And yet it is better perhaps to speak out than to keep my feelings gnawing within me.

II

I have known my master these thirty years. Neither calumny, nor disaster, nor death itself has any terrors for him. Nothing could have saved me, born as I was into the traditions of this family of ours, but that he has established his own life in the centre of mine, with its peace and truth and spiritual vision, thus making it possible for me to realize goodness in its truth.

My master came to me that day and said: "Is it necessary to detain Sandip here any longer?"

His nature was so sensitive to all omens of evil that he had at once understood. He was not easily moved, but that day he felt the dark shadow of trouble ahead. Do I not know how well he loves me?

At tea−time I said to Sandip: "I have just had a letter from Rangpur. They are complaining that I am selfishly detaining you. When will you be going there?"

Bimala was pouring out the tea. Her face fell at once. She threw just one enquiring glance at Sandip.

"I have been thinking," said Sandip, "that this wandering up and down means a tremendous waste of energy. I feel that if I could work from a centre I could achieve more permanent results."

With this he looked up at Bimala and asked: "Do you not think so too?"

Bimala hesitated for a reply and then said: "Both ways seem good to do the work from a centre, as well as by travelling about. That in which you find greater satisfaction is the way for you."

"Then let me speak out my mind," said Sandip. "I have never yet found any one source of inspiration suffice me for good. That is why I have been constantly moving about, rousing enthusiasm in the people, from which in turn I draw my own store of energy. Today you have given me the message of my country. Such fire I have never beheld in any man. I shall be able to spread the fire of enthusiasm in my country by borrowing it from you. No, do not be ashamed. You are far above all modesty and diffidence. You are the Queen Bee of our hive, and we the workers shall rally around you. You shall be our centre, our inspiration."

Bimala flushed all over with bashful pride and her hand shook as she went on pouring out the tea.

Another day my master came to me and said: "Why don't you two go up to Darjeeling for a change? You are not looking well. Have you been getting enough sleep?"

I asked Bimala in the evening whether she would care to have a trip to the Hills. I knew she had a great longing to see the Himalayas. But she refused . . . The country's Cause, I suppose!

I must not lose my faith: I shall wait. The passage from the narrow to the larger world is stormy. When she is familiar with this freedom, then I shall know where my place is. If I discover that I do not fit in with the arrangement of the outer world, then I shall not quarrel with my fate, but silently take my leave . . . Use force? But for what? Can force prevail against Truth?

Sandip's Story

I

The impotent man says: "That which has come to my share is mine." And the weak man assents. But the lesson of the whole world is: "That is really mine which I can snatch away." My country does not become mine simply because it is the country of my birth. It becomes mine on the day when I am able to win it by force.

Every man has a natural right to possess, and therefore greed is natural. It is not in the wisdom of nature that we should be content to be deprived. What my mind covets, my surroundings must supply. This is the only true understanding between our inner and outer nature in this world. Let moral ideals remain merely for those poor anaemic creatures of starved desire whose grasp is weak. Those who can desire with all their soul and enjoy with all their heart, those who have no hesitation or scruple, it is they who are the anointed of Providence. Nature spreads out her riches and loveliest treasures for their benefit. They swim across streams, leap over walls, kick open doors, to help themselves to whatever is worth taking. In such a getting one can rejoice; such wresting as this gives value to the thing taken.

Nature surrenders herself, but only to the robber. For she delights in this forceful desire, this forceful abduction. And so she does not put the garland of her acceptance round the lean, scraggy neck of the ascetic.

The music of the wedding march is struck. The time of the wedding I must not let pass. My heart therefore is eager. For, who is the bridegroom? It is I. The bridegroom's place belongs to him who, torch in hand, can come in time. The bridegroom in Nature's wedding hall comes unexpected and uninvited.

Ashamed? No, I am never ashamed! I ask for whatever I want, and I do not always wait to ask before I take it. Those who are deprived by their own diffidence dignify their privation by the name of modesty. The world into which we are born is the world of reality. When a man goes away from the market of real things with empty hands and empty stomach, merely filling his bag with big sounding words, I wonder why he ever came into this hard world at all. Did these men get their appointment from the epicures of the religious world, to play set tunes on sweet, pious texts in that pleasure garden where blossom airy nothings? I neither affect those tunes nor do I find any sustenance in those blossoms.

What I desire, I desire positively, superlatively. I want to knead it with both my hands and both my feet; I want to smear it all over my body; I want to gorge myself with it to the full. The scrannel pipes of those who have worn themselves out by their moral fastings, till they have become flat and pale like starved vermin infesting a long−deserted bed, will never reach my ear.

I would conceal nothing, because that would be cowardly. But if I cannot bring myself to conceal when concealment is needful, that also is cowardly. Because you have your greed, you build your walls. Because I have my greed, I break through them. You use your power: I use my craft. These are the realities of life. On these depend kingdoms and empires and all the great enterprises of men.

As for those *avatars* who come down from their paradise to talk to us in some holy jargon their words are not real. Therefore, in spite of all the applause they get, these sayings of theirs only find a place in the hiding corners of the weak. They are despised by those who are strong, the rulers of the world. Those who have had the courage to see this have won success, while those poor wretches who are dragged one way by nature and the other way by these ava tars, they set one foot in the boat of the real and the other in the boat of the unreal, and thus are in a pitiable plight, able neither to advance nor to keep their place.

There are many men who seem to have been born only with an obsession to die. Possibly there is a beauty, like that of a sunset, in this lingering death in life which seems to fascinate them. Nikhil lives this kind of life, if life it may be called. Years ago, I had a great argument with him on this point.

"It is true," he said, "that you cannot get anything except by force. But then what is this force? And then also, what is this getting? The strength I believe in is the strength of renouncing."

"So you," I exclaimed, "are infatuated with the glory of bankruptcy."

"Just as desperately as the chick is infatuated about the bankruptcy of its shell," he replied. "The shell is real enough, yet it is given up in exchange for intangible light and air. A sorry exchange, I suppose you would call it?"

When once Nikhil gets on to metaphor, there is no hope of making him see that he is merely dealing with words, not with realities. Well, well, let him be happy with his metaphors. We are the flesh−eaters of the world; we have teeth and nails; we pursue and grab and tear. We are not satisfied with chewing in the evening the cud of the grass we have eaten in the morning. Anyhow, we cannot allow your metaphor−mongers to bar the door to our sustenance. In that case we shall simply steal or rob, for we must live.

People will say that I am starting some novel theory just because those who are moving in this world are in the habit of talking differently though they are really acting up to it all the time. Therefore they fail to understand, as I do, that this is the only working moral principle. In point of fact, I know that my idea is not

an empty theory at all, for it has been proved in practical life. I have found that my way always wins over the hearts of women, who are creatures of this world of reality and do not roam about in cloud−land, as men do, in idea−filled balloons.

Women find in my features, my manner, my gait, my speech, a masterful passion not a passion dried thin with the heat of asceticism, not a passion with its face turned back at every step in doubt and debate, but a full−blooded passion. It roars and rolls on, like a flood, with the cry: "I want, I want, I want." Women feel, in their own heart of hearts, that this indomitable passion is the lifeblood of the world, acknowledging no law but itself, and therefore victorious. For this reason they have so often abandoned themselves to be swept away on the flood−tide of my passion, recking naught as to whether it takes them to life or to death. This power which wins these women is the power of mighty men, the power which wins the world of reality.

Those who imagine the greater desirability of another world merely shift their desires from the earth to the skies. It remains to be seen how high their gushing fountain will play, and for how long. But this much is certain: women were not created for these pale creatures these lotus−eaters of idealism.

"Affinity!" When it suited my need, I have often said that God has created special pairs of men and women, and that the union of such is the only legitimate union, higher than all unions made by law. The reason of it is, that though man wants to follow nature, he can find no pleasure in it unless he screens himself with some phrase and that is why this world is so overflowing with lies.

"Affinity!" Why should there be only one? There may be affinity with thousands. It was never in my agreement with nature that I should overlook all my innumerable affinities for the sake of only one. I have discovered many in my own life up to now, yet that has not closed the door to one more and that one is clearly visible to my eyes. She has also discovered her own affinity to me.

And then?

Then, if I do not win I am a coward.

Chapter Three. Bimala's Story

VI

I WONDER what could have happened to my feeling of shame. The fact is, I had no time to think about myself. My days and nights were passing in a whirl, like an eddy with myself in the centre. No gap was left for hesitation or delicacy to enter.

One day my sister−in−law remarked to my husband: "Up to now the women of this house have been kept weeping. Here comes the men's turn.

"We must see that they do not miss it," she continued, turning to me. "I see you are out for the fray, Chota [12] Rani! Hurl your shafts straight at their hearts."

Her keen eyes looked me up and down. Not one of the colours into which my toilet, my dress, my manners, my speech, had blossomed out had escaped her. I am ashamed to speak of it today, but I felt no shame then. Something within me was at work of which I was not even conscious. I used to overdress, it is true, but more like an automaton, with no particular design. No doubt I knew which effort of mine would prove specially pleasing to Sandip Babu, but that required no intuition, for he would discuss it openly before all of them.

One day he said to my husband: "Do you know, Nikhil, when I first saw our Queen Bee, she was sitting there so demurely in her gold−bordered *sari*. Her eyes were gazing inquiringly into space, like stars which had lost their way, just as if she had been for ages standing on the edge of some darkness, looking out for something unknown. But when I saw her, I felt a quiver run through me. It seemed to me that the gold border of her *sari* was her own inner fire flaming out and twining round her. That is the flame we want, visible fire! Look here, Queen Bee, you really must do us the favour of dressing once more as a living flame."

So long I had been like a small river at the border of a village. My rhythm and my language were different from what they are now. But the tide came up from the sea, and my breast heaved; my banks gave way and the great drumbeats of the sea waves echoed in my mad current. I could not understand the meaning of that sound in my blood. Where was that former self of mine? Whence came foaming into me this surging flood of glory? Sandip's hungry eyes burnt like the lamps of worship before my shrine. All his gaze proclaimed that I was a wonder in beauty and power; and the loudness of his praise, spoken and unspoken, drowned all other voices in my world. Had the Creator created me afresh, I wondered? Did he wish to make up now for neglecting me so long? I who before was plain had become suddenly beautiful. I who before had been of no account now felt in myself all the splendour of Bengal itself.

For Sandip Babu was not a mere individual. In him was the confluence of millions of minds of the country. When he called me the Queen Bee of the hive, I was acclaimed with a chorus of praise by all our patriot workers. After that, the loud jests of my sister−in−law could not touch me any longer. My relations with all the world underwent a change. Sandip Babu made it clear how all the country was in need of me. I had no difficulty in believing this at the time, for I felt that I had the power to do everything. Divine strength had come to me. It was something which I had never felt before, which was beyond myself. I had no time to question it to find out what was its nature. It seemed to belong to me, and yet to transcend me. It comprehended the whole of Bengal.

Sandip Babu would consult me about every little thing touching the Cause. At first I felt very awkward and would hang back, but that soon wore off. Whatever I suggested seemed to astonish him. He would go into raptures and say: "Men can only think. You women have a way of understanding without thinking. Woman was created out of God's own fancy. Man, He had to hammer into shape."

Letters used to come to Sandip Babu from all parts of the country which were submitted to me for my opinion. Occasionally he disagreed with me. But I would not argue with him. Then after a day or two as if a new light had suddenly dawned upon him he would send for me and say: "It was my mistake. Your suggestion was the correct one." He would often confess to me that wherever he had taken steps contrary to my advice he had gone wrong. Thus I gradually came to be convinced that behind whatever was taking place was Sandip Babu, and behind Sandip Babu was the plain common sense of a woman. The glory of a great responsibility filled my being.

My husband had no place in our counsels. Sandip Babu treated him as a younger brother, of whom personally one may be very fond and yet have no use for his business advice. He would tenderly and smilingly talk about my husband's childlike innocence, saying that his curious doctrine and perversities of mind had a flavour of humour which made them all the more lovable. It was seemingly this very affection for Nikhil which led Sandip Babu to forbear from troubling him with the burden of the country.

Nature has many anodynes in her pharmacy, which she secretly administers when vital relations are being insidiously severed, so that none may know of the operation, till at last one awakes to know what a great rent has been made. When the knife was busy with my life's most intimate tie, my mind was so clouded with fumes of intoxicating gas that I was not in the least aware of what a cruel thing was happening. Possibly this is woman's nature. When her passion is roused she loses her sensibility for all that is outside it. When, like the river, we women keep to our banks, we give nourishment with all that we have: when we overflow them

we destroy with all that we are.

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12. Bimala. the younger brother's wife, was the *Chota* or Junior Rani.

Sandip's Story

II

I can see that something has gone wrong. I got an inkling of it the other day.

Ever since my arrival, Nikhil's sitting−room had become a thing amphibious half women's apartment, half men's: Bimala had access to it from the zenana, it was not barred to me from the outer side. If we had only gone slow, and made use of our privileges with some restraint, we might not have fallen foul of other people. But we went ahead so vehemently that we could not think of the consequences.

Whenever Bee comes into Nikhil's room, I somehow get to know of it from mine. There are the tinkle of bangles and other little sounds; the door is perhaps shut with a shade of unnecessary vehemence; the bookcase is a trifle stiff and creaks if jerked open. When I enter I find Bee, with her back to the door, ever so busy selecting a book from the shelves. And as I offer to assist her in this difficult task she starts and protests; and then we naturally get on to other topics.

The other day, on an inauspicious [13] Thursday afternoon, I sallied forth from my room at the call of these same sounds. There was a man on guard in the passage. I walked on without so much as glancing at him, but as I approached the door he put himself in my way saying: "Not that way, sir."

"Not that way! Why?"

"The Rani Mother is there."

"Oh, very well. Tell your Rani Mother that Sandip Babu wants to see her."

"That cannot be, sir. It is against orders."

I felt highly indignant. "I order you!" I said in a raised voice.

"Go and announce me."

The fellow was somewhat taken aback at my attitude. In the meantime I had neared the door. I was on the point of reaching it, when he followed after me and took me by the arm saying: "No, sir, you must not."

What! To be touched by a flunkey! I snatched away my arm and gave the man a sounding blow. At this moment Bee came out of the room to find the man about to insult me.

I shall never forget the picture of her wrath! That Bee is beautiful is a discovery of my own. Most of our people would see nothing in her. Her tall, slim figure these boors would call "lanky". But it is just this lithesomeness of hers that I admire like an up−leaping fountain of life, coming direct out of the depths of the Creator's heart. Her complexion is dark, but it is the lustrous darkness of a sword−blade, keen and scintillating.

"Nanku!" she commanded, as she stood in the doorway, pointing with her finger, "leave us."

"Do not be angry with him," said I. "If it is against orders, it is I who should retire."

Bee's voice was still trembling as she replied: "You must not go. Come in."

It was not a request, but again a command! I followed her in, and taking a chair fanned myself with a fan which was on the table. Bee scribbled something with a pencil on a sheet of paper and, summoning a servant, handed it to him saying: "Take this to the Maharaja."

"Forgive me," I resumed. "I was unable to control myself, and hit that man of yours.

"You served him right," said Bee.

"But it was not the poor fellow's fault, after all. He was only obeying his orders."

Here Nikhil came in, and as he did so I left my seat with a rapid movement and went and stood near the window with my back to the room.

"Nanku, the guard, has insulted Sandip Babu," said Bee to Nikhil.

Nikhil seemed to be so genuinely surprised that I had to turn round and stare at him. Even an outrageously good man fails in keeping up his pride of truthfulness before his wife if she be the proper kind of woman.

"He insolently stood in the way when Sandip Babu was coming in here," continued Bee. "He said he had orders . . ."

"Whose orders?" asked Nikhil.

"How am I to know?" exclaimed Bee impatiently, her eyes brimming over with mortification.

Nikhil sent for the man and questioned him. "It was not my fault," Nanku repeated sullenly. "I had my orders."

"Who gave you the order?"

"The Bara Rani Mother."

We were all silent for a while. After the man had left, Bee said: "Nanku must go!"

Nikhil remained silent. I could see that his sense of justice would not allow this. There was no end to his qualms. But this time he was up against a tough problem. Bee was not the woman to take things lying down. She would have to get even with her sister−in−law by punishing this fellow. And as Nikhil remained silent, her eyes flashed fire. She knew not how to pour her scorn upon her husband's feebleness of spirit. Nikhil left the room after a while without another word.

The next day Nanku was not to be seen. On inquiry, I learnt that he had been sent off to some other part of the estates, and that his wages had not suffered by such transfer.

I could catch glimpses of the ravages of the storm raging over this, behind the scenes. All I can say is, that Nikhil is a curious creature, quite out of the common.

The upshot was, that after this Bee began to send for me to the sitting−room, for a chat, without any contrivance, or pretence of its being an accident. Thus from bare suggestion we came to broad hint: the implied came to be expressed. The daughter−in−law of a princely house lives in a starry region so remote from the ordinary outsider that there is not even a regular road for his approach. What a triumphal progress of Truth was this which, gradually but persistently, thrust aside veil after veil of obscuring custom, till at length Nature herself was laid bare.

Truth? Of course it was the truth! The attraction of man and woman for each other is fundamental. The whole world of matter, from the speck of dust upwards, is ranged on its side. And yet men would keep it hidden away out of sight, behind a tissue of words; and with home−made sanctions and prohibitions make of it a domestic utensil. Why, it's as absurd as melting down the solar system to make a watch−chain for one's son−in−law! [14]

When, in spite of all, reality awakes at the call of what is but naked truth, what a gnashing of teeth and beating of breasts is there! But can one carry on a quarrel with a storm? It never takes the trouble to reply, it only gives a shaking.

I am enjoying the sight of this truth, as it gradually reveals itself. These tremblings of steps, these turnings of the face, are sweet to me: and sweet are the deceptions which deceive not only others, but also Bee herself. When Reality has to meet the unreal, deception is its principal weapon; for its enemies always try to shame Reality by calling it gross, and so it needs must hide itself, or else put on some disguise. The circumstances are such that it dare not frankly avow: "Yes, I am gross, because I am true. I am flesh. I am passion. I am hunger, unashamed and cruel."

All is now clear to me. The curtain flaps, and through it I can see the preparations for the catastrophe. The little red ribbon, which peeps through the luxuriant masses of her hair, with its flush of secret longing, it is the lolling tongue of the red storm cloud. I feel the warmth of each turn of her *sari*, each suggestion of her raiment, of which even the wearer may not be fully conscious.

Bee was not conscious, because she was ashamed of the reality; to which men have given a bad name, calling it Satan; and so it has to steal into the garden of paradise in the guise of a snake, and whisper secrets into the ears of man's chosen consort and make her rebellious; then farewell to all ease; and after that comes death!

My poor little Queen Bee is living in a dream. She knows not which way she is treading. It would not be safe to awaken her before the time. It is best for me to pretend to be equally unconscious.

The other day, at dinner, she was gazing at me in a curious sort of way, little realizing what such glances mean! As my eyes met hers, she turned away with a flush. "You are surprised at my appetite," I remarked. "I can hide everything, except that I am greedy! Anyhow, why trouble to blush for me, since I am shameless?"

This only made her colour more furiously, as she stammered: "No, no, I was only. . ."

"I know," I interrupted. "Women have a weakness for greedy men; for it is this greed of ours which gives them the upper hand. The indulgence which I have always received at their hands has made me all the more shameless. I do not mind your watching the good things disappear, not one bit. I mean to enjoy every one of them."

The other day I was reading an English book in which sex−problems were treated in an audaciously realistic manner. I had left it lying in the sitting−room. As I went there the next afternoon, for something or other, I found Bee seated with this book in her hand. When she heard my footsteps she hurriedly put it down and placed another book over it a volume of Mrs Hemans's poems.

"I have never been able to make out," I began, "why women are so shy about being caught reading poetry. We men lawyers, mechanics, or what not may well feel ashamed. If we must read poetry, it should be at dead of night, within closed doors. But you women are so akin to poesy. The Creator Himself is a lyric poet, and Jayadeva [15] must have practised the divine art seated at His feet."

Bee made no reply, but only blushed uncomfortably. She made as if she would leave the room. Whereupon I protested: "No, no, pray read on. I will just take a book I left here, and run away." With which I took up my book from the table. "Lucky you did not think of glancing over its pages," I continued, "or you would have wanted to chastise me."

"Indeed! Why?" asked Bee.

"Because it is not poetry," said I. "Only blunt things, bluntly put, without any finicking niceness. I wish Nikhil would read it."

Bee frowned a little as she murmured: "What makes you wish that?"

"He is a man, you see, one of us. My only quarrel with him is that he delights in a misty vision of this world. Have you not observed how this trait of his makes him look on *Swadeshi* as if it was some poem of which the metre must be kept correct at every step? We, with the clubs of our prose, are the iconoclasts of metre."

"What has your book to do with *Swadeshi*?"

"You would know if you only read it. Nikhil wants to go by made−up maxims, in *Swadeshi* as in everything else; so he knocks up against human nature at every turn, and then falls to abusing it. He never will realize that human nature was created long before phrases were, and will survive them too."

Bee was silent for a while and then gravely said: "Is it not a part of human nature to try and rise superior to itself?"

I smiled inwardly. "These are not your words", I thought to myself. "You have learnt them from Nikhil. You are a healthy human being. Your flesh and blood have responded to the call of reality. You are burning in every vein with life−fire do I not know it? How long should they keep you cool with the wet towel of moral precepts?"

"The weak are in the majority," I said aloud. "They are continually poisoning the ears of men by repeating these shibboleths. Nature has denied them strength it is thus that they try to enfeeble others."

"We women are weak," replied Bimala. "So I suppose we must join in the conspiracy of the weak."

"Women weak!" I exclaimed with a laugh. "Men belaud you as delicate and fragile, so as to delude you into thinking yourselves weak. But it is you women who are strong. Men make a great outward show of their so−called freedom, but those who know their inner minds are aware of their bondage. They have manufactured scriptures with their own hands to bind themselves; with their very idealism they have made golden fetters of women to wind round their body and mind. If men had not that extraordinary faculty of entangling themselves in meshes of their own contriving, nothing could have kept them bound. But as for you women, you have desired to conceive reality with body and soul. You have given birth to reality. You have suckled reality at your breasts."

Bee was well read for a woman, and would not easily give in to my arguments. "If that were true," she objected, "men would not have found women attractive."

"Women realize the danger," I replied. "They know that men love delusions, so they give them full measure by borrowing their own phrases. They know that man, the drunkard, values intoxication more than food, and so they try to pass themselves off as an intoxicant. As a matter of fact, but for the sake of man, woman has no need for any make−believe."

"Why, then, are you troubling to destroy the illusion?"

"For freedom. I want the country to be free. I want human relations to be free."

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13. According to the Hindu calendar [Trans.].

14. The son−in−law is the pet of a Hindu household.

15. A Vaishnava poet (Sanskrit) whose lyrics of the adoration of the Divinity serve as well to express all shades of human passion [Trans.].

III

I was aware that it is unsafe suddenly to awake a sleep−walker. But I am so impetuous by nature, a halting gait does not suit me. I knew I was overbold that day. I knew that the first shock of such ideas is apt to be almost intolerable. But with women it is always audacity that wins.

Just as we were getting on nicely, who should walk in but Nikhil's old tutor Chandranath Babu. The world would have been not half a bad place to live in but for these schoolmasters, who make one want to quit in disgust. The Nikhil type wants to keep the world always a school. This incarnation of a school turned up that afternoon at the psychological moment.

We all remain schoolboys in some corner of our hearts, and I, even I, felt somewhat pulled up. As for poor Bee, she at once took her place solemnly, like the topmost girl of the class on the front bench. All of a sudden she seemed to remember that she had to face her examination.

Some people are so like eternal pointsmen lying in wait by the line, to shunt one's train of thought from one rail to another.

Chandranath Babu had no sooner come in than he cast about for some excuse to retire, mumbling: "I beg your pardon, I. . ."

Before he could finish, Bee went up to him and made a profound obeisance, saying: "Pray do not leave us, sir. Will you not take a seat?" She looked like a drowning person clutching at him for support the little coward!

But possibly I was mistaken. It is quite likely that there was a touch of womanly wile in it. She wanted, perhaps, to raise her value in my eyes. She might have been pointedly saying to me: "Please don't imagine for a moment that I am entirely overcome by you. My respect for Chandranath Babu is even greater."

Well, indulge in your respect by all means! Schoolmasters thrive on it. But not being one of them, I have no use for that empty compliment.

Chandranath Babu began to talk about *Swadeshi*. I thought I would let him go on with his monologues. There

is nothing like letting an old man talk himself out. It makes him feel that he is winding up the world, forgetting all the while how far away the real world is from his wagging tongue.

But even my worst enemy would not accuse me of patience. And when Chandranath Babu went on to say: "If we expect to gather fruit where we have sown no seed, then we . . ." I had to interrupt him.

"Who wants fruit?" I cried. "We go by the Author of the Gita who says that we are concerned only with the doing, not with the fruit of our deeds."

"What is it then that you do want?" asked Chandranath Babu.

"Thorns!" I exclaimed, "which cost nothing to plant."

"Thorns do not obstruct others only," he replied. "They have a way of hurting one's own feet."

"That is all right for a copy−book," I retorted. "But the real thing is that we have this burning at heart. Now we have only to cultivate thorns for others" soles; afterwards when they hurt us we shall find leisure to repent. But why be frightened even of that? When at last we have to die it will be time enough to get cold. While we are on fire let us seethe and boil."

Chandranath Babu smiled. "Seethe by all means," he said, "but do not mistake it for work, or heroism. Nations which have got on in the world have done so by action, not by ebullition. Those who have always lain in dread of work, when with a start they awake to their sorry plight, they look to short−cuts and scamping for their deliverance."

I was girding up my loins to deliver a crushing reply, when Nikhil came back. Chandranath Babu rose, and looking towards Bee, said: "Let me go now, my little mother, I have some work to attend to."

As he left, I showed Nikhil the book in my hand. "I was telling Queen Bee about this book," I said.

Ninety−nine per cent of people have to be deluded with lies, but it. is easier to delude this perpetual pupil of the schoolmaster with the truth. He is best cheated openly. So, in playing with him, the simplest course was to lay my cards on the table.

Nikhil read the title on the cover, but said nothing. "These writers," I continued, "are busy with their brooms, sweeping away the dust of epithets with which men have covered up this world of ours. So, as I was saying, I wish you would read it."

"I have read it," said Nikhil.

"Well, what do you say?"

"It is all very well for those who really care to think, but poison for those who shirk thought."

"What do you mean?"

"Those who preach 'Equal Rights of Property' should not be thieves. For, if they are, they would be preaching lies. When passion is in the ascendant, this kind of book is not rightly understood."

"Passion," I replied, "is the street lamp which guides us. To call it untrue is as hopeless as to expect to see better by plucking out our natural eyes."

Nikhil was visibly growing excited. "I accept the truth of passion," he said, "only when I recognize the truth of restraint. By pressing what we want to see right into our eyes we only injure them: we do not see. So does the violence of passion, which would leave no space between the mind and its object, defeat its purpose."

"It is simply your intellectual foppery," I replied, "which makes you indulge in moral delicacy, ignoring the savage side of truth. This merely helps you to mystify things, and so you fail to do your work with any degree of strength."

"The intrusion of strength," said Nikhil impatiently, "where strength is out of place, does not help you in your work . . . But why are we arguing about these things? Vain arguments only brush off the fresh bloom of truth."

I wanted Bee to join in the discussion, but she had not said a word up to now. Could I have given her too rude a shock, leaving her assailed with doubts and wanting to learn her lesson afresh from the schoolmaster? Still, a thorough shaking−up is essential. One must begin by realizing that things supposed to be unshakeable can be shaken.

"I am glad I had this talk with you," I said to Nikhil, "for I was on the point of lending this book to Queen Bee to read."

"What harm?" said Nikhil. "If I could read the book, why not Bimala too? All I want to say is, that in Europe people look at everything from the viewpoint of science. But man is neither mere physiology, nor biology, nor psychology, nor even sociology. For God's sake don't forget that. Man is infinitely more than the natural science of himself. You laugh at me, calling me the schoolmaster's pupil, but that is what you are, not I. You want to find the truth of man from your science teachers, and not from your own inner being."

"But why all this excitement?" I mocked.

"Because I see you are bent on insulting man and making him petty."

"Where on earth do you see all that?"

"In the air, in my outraged feelings. You would go on wounding the great, the unselfish, the beautiful in man."

"What mad idea is this of yours?"

Nikhil suddenly stood up. "I tell you plainly, Sandip," he said, "man may be wounded unto death, but he will not die. This is the reason why I am ready to suffer all, knowing all, with eyes open."

With these words he hurriedly left the room.

I was staring blankly at his retreating figure, when the sound of a book, falling from the table, made me turn to find Bee following him with quick, nervous steps, making a detour to avoid passing too near me.

A curious creature, that Nikhil! He feels the danger threatening his home, and yet why does he not turn me out? I know, he is waiting for Bimal to give him the cue. If Bimal tells him that their mating has been a misfit, he will bow his head and admit that it may have been a blunder! He has not the strength of mind to understand that to acknowledge a mistake is the greatest of all mistakes. He is a typical example of how ideas make for weakness. I have not seen another like him so whimsical a product of nature! He would hardly do as a character in a novel or drama, to say nothing of real life.

And Bee? I am afraid her dream−life is over from today. She has at length understood the nature of the current which is bearing her along. Now she must either advance or retreat, open−eyed. The chances are she will now advance a step, and then retreat a step. But that does not disturb me. When one is on fire, this rushing to and fro makes the blaze all the fiercer. The fright she has got will only fan her passion.

Perhaps I had better not say much to her, but simply select some modern books for her to read. Let her gradually come to the conviction that to acknowledge and respect passion as the supreme reality, is to be modern not to be ashamed of it, not to glorify restraint. If she finds shelter in some such word as "modern", she will find strength.

Be that as it may, I must see this out to the end of the Fifth Act. I cannot, unfortunately, boast of being merely a spectator, seated in the royal box, applauding now and again. There is a wrench at my heart, a pang in every nerve. When I have put out the light and am in my bed, little touches, little glances, little words flit about and fill the darkness. When I get up in the morning, I thrill with lively anticipations, my blood seems to course through me to the strains of music . . .

There was a double photo−frame on the table with Bee's photograph by the side of Nikhil's. I had taken out hers. Yesterday I showed Bee the empty side and said: "Theft becomes necessary only because of miserliness, so its sin must be divided between the miser and the thief. Do you not think so?"

"It was not a good one," observed Bee simply, with a little smile.

"What is to be done?" said I. "A portrait cannot be better than a portrait. I must be content with it, such as it is."

Bee took up a book and began to turn over the pages. "If you are annoyed," I went on, "I must make a shift to fill up the vacancy."

Today I have filled it up. This photograph of mine was taken in my early youth. My face was then fresher, and so was my mind. Then I still cherished some illusions about this world and the next. Faith deceives men, but it has one great merit: it imparts a radiance to the features.

My portrait now reposes next to Nikhil's, for are not the two of us old friends?

Chapter Four

Nikhil's Story

III

I WAS never self−conscious. But nowadays I often try to take an outside view to see myself as Bimal sees me. What a dismally solemn picture it makes, my habit of taking things too seriously!

Better, surely, to laugh away the world than flood it with tears. That is, in fact, how the world gets on. We relish our food and rest, only because we can dismiss, as so many empty shadows, the sorrows scattered everywhere, both in the home and in the outer world. If we took them as true, even for a moment, where would be our appetite, our sleep?

But I cannot dismiss myself as one of these shadows, and so the load of my sorrow lies eternally heavy on the heart of my world.

Why not stand out aloof in the highway of the universe, and feel yourself to be part of the all? In the midst of the immense, age−long concourse of humanity, what is Bimal to you? Your wife? What is a wife? A bubble of a name blown big with your own breath, so carefully guarded night and day, yet ready to burst at any pin−prick from outside.

My wife and so, forsooth, my very own! If she says: "No, I am myself" am I to reply: "How can that be? Are you not mine?"

"My wife" Does that amount to an argument, much less the truth? Can one imprison a whole personality within that name?

My wife! Have I not cherished in this little world all that is purest and sweetest in my life, never for a moment letting it down from my bosom to the dust? What incense of worship, what music of passion, what flowers of my spring and of my autumn, have I not offered up at its shrine? If, like a toy paper−boat, she be swept along into the muddy waters of the gutter would I not also. . . ?

There it is again, my incorrigible solemnity! Why "muddy"? What "gutter,? Names, called in a fit of jealousy, do not change the facts of the world. If Bimal is not mine, she is not; and no fuming, or fretting, or arguing will serve to prove that she is. If my heart is breaking let it break! That will not make the world bankrupt nor even me; for man is so much greater than the things he loses in this life. The very ocean of tears has its other shore, else none would have ever wept.

But then there is Society to be considered . . . which let Society consider! If I weep it is for myself, not for Society. If Bimal should say she is not mine, what care I where my Society wife may be?

Suffering there must be; but I must save myself, by any means in my power, from one form of self−torture: I must never think that my life loses its value because of any neglect it may suffer. The full value of my life does not all go to buy my narrow domestic world; its great commerce does not stand or fall with some petty success or failure in the bartering of my personal joys and sorrows.

The time has come when I must divest Bimala of all the ideal decorations with which I decked her. It was owing to my own weakness that I indulged in such idolatry. I was too greedy. I created an angel of Bimala, in order to exaggerate my own enjoyment. But Bimala is what she is. It is preposterous to expect that she should assume the rôle of an angel for my pleasure. The Creator is under no obligation to supply me with angels, just because I have an avidity for imaginary perfection.

I must acknowledge that I have merely been an accident in Bimala's life. Her nature, perhaps, can only find true union with one like Sandip. At the same time, I must not, in false modesty, accept my rejection as my desert. Sandip certainly has attractive qualities, which had their sway also upon myself; but yet, I feel sure, he is not a greater man than I. If the wreath of victory falls to his lot today, and I am overlooked, then the dispenser of the wreath will be called to judgement.

I say this in no spirit of boasting. Sheer necessity has driven me to the pass, that to secure myself from utter desolation I must recognize all the value that I truly possess. Therefore, through the, terrible experience of suffering let there come upon me the joy of deliverance deliverance from self−distrust.

I have come to distinguish what is really in me from what I foolishly imagined to be there. The profit and loss account has been settled, and that which remains is myself not a crippled self, dressed in rags and tatters, not a sick self to be nursed on invalid diet, but a spirit which has gone through the worst, and has survived.

My master passed through my room a moment ago and said with his hand on my shoulder. "Get away to bed,

Nikhil, the night is far advanced."

The fact is, it has become so difficult for me to go to bed till late till Bimal is fast asleep. In the day−time we meet, and even converse, but what am I to say when we are alone together, in the silence of the night? so ashamed do I feel in mind and body.

"How is it, sir, you have not yet retired?" I asked in my turn. My master smiled a little, as he left me, saying: "My sleeping days are over. I have now attained the waking age.

I had written thus far, and was about to rise to go off bedwards when, through the window before me, I saw the heavy pall of July cloud suddenly part a little, and a big star shine through. It seemed to say to me: "Dreamland ties are made, and dreamland ties are broken, but I am here for ever the everlasting lamp of the bridal night."

All at once my heart was full with the thought that my Eternal Love was steadfastly waiting for me through the ages, behind the veil of material things. Through many a life, in many a mirror, have I seen her image broken mirrors, crooked mirrors, dusty mirrors. Whenever I have sought to make the mirror my very own, and shut it up within my box, I have lost sight of the image. But what of that. What have I to do with the mirror, or even the image?

My beloved, your smile shall never fade, and every dawn there shall appear fresh for me the vermilion mark on your forehead!

"What childish cajolery of self−deception," mocks some devil from his dark corner "silly prattle to make children quiet!"

That may be. But millions and millions of children, with their million cries, have to be kept quiet. Can it be that all this multitude is quieted with only a lie? No, my Eternal Love cannot deceive me, for she is true!

She is true; that is why I have seen her and shall see her so often, even in my mistakes, even through the thickest mist of tears. I have seen her and lost her in the crowd of life's market−place, and found her again; and I shall find her once more when I have escaped through the loophole of death.

Ah, cruel one, play with me no longer! If I have failed to track you by the marks of your footsteps on the way, by the scent of your tresses lingering in the air, make me not weep for that for ever. The unveiled star tells me not to fear. That which is eternal must always be there.

Now let me go and see my Bimala. She must have spread her tired limbs on the bed, limp after her struggles, and be asleep. I will leave a kiss on her forehead without waking her that shall be the flower−offering of my worship. I believe I could forget everything after death all my mistakes, all my sufferings but some vibration of the memory of that kiss would remain; for the wreath which is being woven out of the kisses of many a successive birth is to crown the Eternal Beloved.

As the gong of the watch rang out, sounding the hour of two, my sister−in−law came into the room. "Whatever are you doing, brother dear?" [16] she cried. "For pity's sake go to bed and stop worrying so. I cannot bear to look on that awful shadow of pain on your face." Tears welled up in her eyes and overflowed as she entreated me thus.

I could not utter a word, but took the dust of her feet, as I went off to bed.

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16. When a relationship is established by marriage, or by mutual understanding arising out of special friendship or affection, the persons so related call each other in terms of such relationship, and not by name. [Trans.].

Bimala's Story

VII

At first I suspected nothing, feared nothing; I simply felt dedicated to my country. What a stupendous joy there was in this unquestioning surrender. Verily had I realized how, in thoroughness of self−destruction, man can find supreme bliss.

For aught I know, this frenzy of mine might have come to a gradual, natural end. But Sandip Babu would not have it so, he would insist on revealing himself. The tone of his voice became as intimate as a touch, every look flung itself on its knees in beggary. And, through it all, there burned a passion which in its violence made as though it would tear me up by the roots, and drag me along by the hair.

I will not shirk the truth. This cataclysmal desire drew me by day and by night. It seemed desperately alluring this making havoc of myself. What a shame it seemed, how terrible, and yet how sweet! Then there was my overpowering curiosity, to which there seemed no limit. He of whom I knew but little, who never could assuredly be mine, whose youth flared so vigorously in a hundred points of flame oh, the mystery of his seething passions, so immense, so tumultuous!

I began with a feeling of worship, but that soon passed away. I ceased even to respect Sandip; on the contrary, I began to look down upon him. Nevertheless this flesh−and−blood lute of mine, fashioned with my feeling and fancy, found in him a master−player. What though I shrank from his touch, and even came to loathe the lute itself; its music was conjured up all the same.

I must confess there was something in me which . . . what shall I say? . . . which makes me wish I could have died!

Chandranath Babu, when he finds leisure, comes to me. He has the power to lift my mind up to an eminence from where I can see in a moment the boundary of my life extended on all sides and so realize that the lines, which I took from my bounds, were merely imaginary.

But what is the use of it all? Do I really desire emancipation? Let suffering come to our house; let the best in me shrivel up and become black; but let this infatuation not leave me such seems to be my prayer.

When, before my marriage, I used to see a brother−in−law of mine, now dead, mad with drink beating his wife in his frenzy, and then sobbing and howling in maudlin repentance, vowing never to touch liquor again, and yet, the very same evening, sitting down to drink and drink it would fill me with disgust. But my intoxication today is still more fearful. The stuff has not to be procured or poured out: it springs within my veins, and I know not how to resist it.

Must this continue to the end of my days? Now and again I start and look upon myself, and think my life to be a nightmare which will vanish all of a sudden with all its untruth. It has become so frightfully incongruous. It has no connection with its past. What it is, how it could have come to this pass, I cannot understand.

One day my sister−in−law remarked with a cutting laugh: "What a wonderfully hospitable Chota Rani we

have! Her guest absolutely will not budge. In our time there used to be guests, too; but they had not such lavish looking after we were so absurdly taken up with our husbands. Poor brother Nikhil is paying the penalty of being born too modern. He should have come as a guest if he wanted to stay on. Now it looks as if it were time for him to quit . . . O you little demon, do your glances never fall, by chance, on his agonized face?"

This sarcasm did not touch me; for I knew that these women had it not in them to understand the nature of the cause of my devotion. I was then wrapped in the protecting armour of the exaltation of sacrifice, through which such shafts were powerless to reach and shame me.

VIII

For some time all talk of the country's cause has been dropped. Our conversation nowadays has become full of modern sex−problems, and various other matters, with a sprinkling of poetry, both old Vaishnava and modern English, accompanied by a running undertone of melody, low down in the bass, such as I have never in my life heard before, which seems to me to sound the true manly note, the note of power.

The day had come when all cover was gone. There was no longer even the pretence of a reason why Sandip Babu should linger on, or why I should have confidential talks with him every now and then. I felt thoroughly vexed with myself, with my sister−in−law, with the ways of the world, and I vowed I would never again go to the outer apartments, not if I were to die for it.

For two whole days I did not stir out. Then, for the first time, I discovered how far I had travelled. My life felt utterly tasteless. Whatever I touched I wanted to thrust away. I felt myself waiting from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes waiting for something, somebody; my blood kept tingling with some expectation.

I tried busying myself with extra work. The bedroom floor was clean enough but I insisted on its being scrubbed over again under my eyes. Things were arranged in the cabinets in one kind of order; I pulled them all out and rearranged them in a different way. I found no time that afternoon even to do up my hair; I hurriedly tied it into a loose knot, and went and worried everybody, fussing about the store−room. The stores seemed short, and pilfering must have been going on of late, but I could not muster up the courage to take any particular person to task for might not the thought have crossed somebody's mind: "Where were your eyes all these days!"

In short, I behaved that day as one possessed. The next day I tried to do some reading. What I read I have no idea, but after a spell of absentmindedness I found I had wandered away, book in hand, along the passage leading towards the outer apartments, and was standing by a window looking out upon the verandah running along the row of rooms on the opposite side of the quadrangle. One of these rooms, I felt, had crossed over to another shore, and the ferry had ceased to ply. I felt like the ghost of myself of two days ago, doomed to remain where I was, and yet not really there, blankly looking out for ever.

As I stood there, I saw Sandip come out of his room into the verandah, a newspaper in his hand. I could see that he looked extraordinarily disturbed. The courtyard, the railings, in front, seemed to rouse his wrath. He flung away his newspaper with a gesture which seemed to want to rend the space before him.

I felt I could no longer keep my vow. I was about to move on towards the sitting−room, when I found my sister−in−law behind me. "O Lord, this beats everything!" she ejaculated, as she glided away. I could not proceed to the outer apartments.

The next morning when my maid came calling, "Rani Mother, it is getting late for giving out the stores," I flung the keys to her, saying, "Tell Harimati to see to it," and went on with some embroidery of English

pattern on which I was engaged, seated near the window.

Then came a servant with a letter. "From Sandip Babu," said he. What unbounded boldness! What must the messenger have thought? There was a tremor within my breast as I opened the envelope. There was no address on the letter, only the words: *An urgent matter touching the Cause. Sandip*.

I flung aside the embroidery. I was up on my feet in a moment, giving a touch or two to my hair by the mirror. I kept the *sari* I had on, changing only my jacket for one of my jackets had its associations.

I had to pass through one of the verandahs, where my sister−in−law used to sit in the morning slicing betel−nut. I refused to feel awkward. "Whither away, Chota Rani?" she cried.

"To the sitting−room outside."

"So early! A matinée, eh?"

And, as I passed on without further reply, she hummed after me a flippant song.

IX

When I was about to enter the sitting−room, I saw Sandip immersed in an illustrated catalogue of British Academy pictures, with his back to the door. He has a great notion of himself as an expert in matters of Art.

One day my husband said to him: "If the artists ever want a teacher, they need never lack for one so long as you are there." It had not been my husband's habit to speak cuttingly, but latterly there has been a change and he never spares Sandip.

"What makes you suppose that artists need no teachers?" Sandip retorted.

"Art is a creation," my husband replied. "So we should humbly be content to receive our lessons about Art from the work of the artist."

Sandip laughed at this modesty, saying: "You think that meekness is a kind of capital which increases your wealth the more you use it. It is my conviction that those who lack pride only float about like water reeds which have no roots in the soil."

My mind used to be full of contradictions when they talked thus. On the one hand I was eager that my husband should win in argument and that Sandip's pride should be shamed. Yet, on the other, it was Sandip's unabashed pride which attracted me so. It shone like a precious diamond, which knows no diffidence, and sparkles in the face of the sun itself.

I entered the room. I knew Sandip could hear my footsteps as I went forward, but he pretended not to, and kept his eyes on the book.

I dreaded his Art talks, for I could not overcome my delicacy about the pictures he talked of, and the things he said, and had much ado in putting on an air of overdone insensibility to hide my qualms. So, I was almost on the point of retracing my steps, when, with a deep sigh, Sandip raised his eyes, and affected to be startled at the sight of me. "Ah, you have come!" he said.

In his words, in his tone, in his eyes, there was a world of suppressed reproach, as if the claims he had acquired over me made my absence, even for these two or three days, a grievous wrong. I knew this attitude

was an insult to me, but, alas, I had not the power to resent it.

I made no reply, but though I was looking another way, I could not help feeling that Sandip's plaintive gaze had planted itself right on my face, and would take no denial. I did so wish he would say something, so that I could shelter myself behind his words. I cannot tell how long this went on, but at last I could stand it no longer. "What is this matter," I asked, "you are wanting to tell me about?"

Sandip again affected surprise as he said: "Must there always be some matter? Is friendship by itself a crime? Oh, Queen Bee, to think that you should make so light of the greatest thing on earth! Is the heart's worship to be shut out like a stray cur?"

There was again that tremor within me. I could feel the crisis coming, too importunate to be put off. Joy and fear struggled for the mastery. Would my shoulders, I wondered, be broad enough to stand its shock, or would it not leave me overthrown, with my face in the dust?

I was trembling all over. Steadying myself with an effort I repeated: "You summoned me for something touching the Cause, so I have left my household duties to attend to it."

"That is just what I was trying to explain," he said, with a dry laugh. "Do you not know that I come to worship? Have I not told you that, in you, I visualize the *Shakti* of our country? The Geography of a country is not the whole truth. No one can give up his life for a map! When I see you before me, then only do I realize how lovely my country is. When you have anointed me with your own hands, then shall I know I have the sanction of my country; and if, with that in my heart, I fall fighting, it shall not be on the dust of some map−made land, but on a lovingly spread skirt do you know what kind of skirt? like that of the earthen−red *sari* you wore the other day, with a broad blood−red border. Can I ever forget it? Such are the visions which give vigour to life, and joy to death!"

Sandip's eyes took fire as he went on, but whether it was the fire of worship, or of passion, I could not tell. I was reminded of the day on which I first heard him speak, when I could not be sure whether he was a person, or just a living flame.

I had not the power to utter a word. You cannot take shelter behind the walls of decorum when in a moment the fire leaps up and, with the flash of its sword and the roar of its laughter, destroys all the miser's stores. I was in terror lest he should forget himself and take me by the hand. For he shook like a quivering tongue of fire; his eyes showered scorching sparks on me.

"Are you for ever determined," he cried after a pause, "to make gods of your petty household duties you who have it in you to send us to life or to death? Is this power of yours to be kept veiled in a zenana? Cast away all false shame, I pray you; snap your fingers at the whispering around. Take your plunge today into the freedom of the outer world."

When, in Sandip's appeals, his worship of the country gets to be subtly interwoven with his worship of me, then does my blood dance, indeed, and the barriers of my hesitation totter. His talks about Art and Sex, his distinctions between Real and Unreal, had but clogged my attempts at response with some revolting nastiness. This, however, now burst again into a glow before which my repugnance faded away. I felt that my resplendent womanhood made me indeed a goddess. Why should not its glory flash from my forehead with visible brilliance? Why does not my voice find a word, some audible cry, which would be like a sacred spell to my country for its fire initiation?

All of a sudden my maid Khema rushed into the room, dishevelled. "Give me my wages and let me go," she screamed. "Never in all my life have I been so . . ." The rest of her speech was drowned in sobs.

"What is the matter?"

Thako, the Bara Rani's maid, it appeared, had for no rhyme or reason reviled her in unmeasured terms. She was in such a state, it was no manner of use trying to pacify her by saying I would look into the matter afterwards.

The slime of domestic life that lay beneath the lotus bank of womanhood came to the surface. Rather than allow Sandip a prolonged vision of it, I had to hurry back within.

X

My sister−in−law was absorbed in her betel−nuts, the suspicion of a smile playing about her lips, as if nothing untoward had happened. She was still humming the same song.

"Why has your Thako been calling poor Khema names?" I burst out.

"Indeed? The wretch! I will have her broomed out of the house. What a shame to spoil your morning out like this! As for Khema, where are the hussy's manners to go and disturb you when you are engaged? Anyhow, Chota Rani, don't you worry yourself with these domestic squabbles. Leave them to me, and return to your friend."

How suddenly the wind in the sails of our mind veers round! This going to meet Sandip outside seemed, in the light of the zenana code, such an extraordinarily out−of−the−way thing to do that I went off to my own room, at a loss for a reply. I knew this was my sister−in−law's doing and that she had egged her maid on to contrive this scene. But I had brought myself to such an unstable poise that I dared not have my fling.

Why, it was only the other day that I found I could not keep up to the last the unbending hauteur with which I had demanded from my husband the dismissal of the man Nanku. I felt suddenly abashed when the Bara Rani came up and said: "It is really all my fault, brother dear. We are old−fashioned folk, and I did not quite like the ways of your Sandip Babu, so I only told the guard . . . but how was I to know that our Chota Rani would take this as an insult? I thought it would be the other way about! Just my incorrigible silliness!"

The thing which seems so glorious when viewed from the heights of the country's cause, looks so muddy when seen from the bottom. One begins by getting angry, and then feels disgusted.

I shut myself into my room, sitting by the window, thinking how easy life would be if only one could keep in harmony with one's surroundings. How simply the senior Rani sits in her verandah with her betel−nuts and how inaccessible to me has become my natural seat beside my daily duties! Where will it all end, I asked myself? Shall I ever recover, as from a delirium, and forget it all; or am I to be dragged to depths from which there can be no escape in this life? How on earth did I manage to let my good fortune escape me, and spoil my life so? Every wall of this bedroom of mine, which I first entered nine years ago as a bride, stares at me in dismay.

When my husband came home, after his M.A. examination, he brought for me this orchid belonging to some far−away land beyond the seas. From beneath these few little leaves sprang such a cascade of blossoms, it looked as if they were pouring forth from some overturned urn of Beauty. We decided, together, to hang it here, over this window. It flowered only that once, but we have always been in hope of its doing so once more. Curiously enough I have kept on watering it these days, from force of habit, and it is still green.

It is now four years since I framed a photograph of my husband in ivory and put it in the niche over there. If I happen to look that way I have to lower my eyes. Up to last week I used regularly to put there the flowers of

my worship, every morning after my bath. My husband has often chided me over this.

"It shames me to see you place me on a height to which I do not belong," he said one day.

"What nonsense!"

"I am not only ashamed, but also jealous!"

"Just hear him! Jealous of whom, pray?"

"Of that false me. It only shows that I am too petty for you, that you want some extraordinary man who can overpower you with his superiority, and so you needs must take refuge in making for yourself another 'me'."

"This kind of talk only makes me angry," said I.

"What is the use of being angry with me?" he replied. "Blame your fate which allowed you no choice, but made you take me blindfold. This keeps you trying to retrieve its blunder by making me out a paragon."

I felt so hurt at the bare idea that tears started to my eyes that day. And whenever I think of that now, I cannot raise my eyes to the niche.

For now there is another photograph in my jewel case. The other day, when arranging the sitting−room, I brought away that double photo frame, the one in which Sandip's portrait was next to my husband's. To this portrait I have no flowers of worship to offer, but it remains hidden away under my gems. It has all the greater fascination because kept secret. I look at it now and then with doors closed. At night I turn up the lamp, and sit with it in my hand, gazing and gazing. And every night I think of burning it in the flame of the lamp, to be done with it for ever; but every night I heave a sigh and smother it again in my pearls and diamonds.

Ah, wretched woman! What a wealth of love was twined round each one of those jewels! Oh, why am I not dead?

Sandip had impressed it on me that hesitation is not in the nature of woman. For her, neither right nor left has any existence she only moves forward. When the women of our country wake up, he repeatedly insisted, their voice will be unmistakably confident in its utterance of the cry: "I want."

"I want!" Sandip went on one day this was the primal word at the root of all creation. It had no maxim to guide it, but it became fire and wrought itself into suns and stars. Its partiality is terrible. Because it had a desire for man, it ruthlessly sacrificed millions of beasts for millions of years to achieve that desire. That terrible word "I want" has taken flesh in woman, and therefore men, who are cowards, try with all their might to keep back this primeval flood With their earthen dykes. They are afraid lest, laughing and dancing as it goes, it should wash away all the hedges and props of their pumpkin field. Men, in every age, flatter themselves that they have secured this force within the bounds of their convenience, but it gathers and grows. Now it is calm and deep like a lake, but gradually its pressure will increase, the dykes will give way, and the force which has so long been dumb will rush forward with the roar: "I want!"

These words of Sandip echo in my heart−beats like a war−drum. They shame into silence all my conflicts with myself. What do I care what people may think of me? Of what value are that orchid and that niche in my bedroom? What power have they to belittle me, to put me to shame? The primal fire of creation burns in me.

I felt a strong desire to snatch down the orchid and fling it out of the window, to denude the niche of its

picture, to lay bare and naked the unashamed spirit of destruction that raged within me. My arm was raised to do it, but a sudden pang passed through my breast, tears started to my eyes. I threw myself down and sobbed: "What is the end of all this, what is the end?"

Sandip's Story

IV

When I read these pages of the story of my life I seriously question myself: Is this Sandip? Am I made of words? Am I merely a book with a covering of flesh and blood?

The earth is not a dead thing like the moon. She breathes. Her rivers and oceans send up vapours in which she is clothed. She is covered with a mantle of her own dust which flies about the air. The onlooker, gazing upon the earth from the outside, can see only the light reflected from this vapour and this dust. The tracks of the mighty continents are not distinctly visible.

The man, who is alive as this earth is, is likewise always enveloped in the mist of the ideas which he is breathing out. His real land and water remain hidden, and he appears to be made of only lights and shadows.

It seems to me, in this story of my life, that, like a living plant, I am displaying the picture of an ideal world. But I am not merely what I want, what I think I am also what I do not love, what I do not wish to be. My creation had begun before I was born. I had no choice in regard to my surroundings and so must make the best of such material as comes to my hand.

My theory of life makes me certain that the Great is cruel To be just is for ordinary men it is reserved for the great to be unjust. The surface of the earth was even. The volcano butted it with its fiery horn and found its own eminence its justice was not towards its obstacle, but towards itself. Successful injustice and genuine cruelty have been the only forces by which individual or nation has become millionaire or monarch.

That is why I preach the great discipline of Injustice. I say to everyone: Deliverance is based upon injustice. Injustice is the fire which must keep on burning something in order to save itself from becoming ashes. Whenever an individual or nation becomes incapable of perpetrating injustice it is swept into the dust−bin of the world.

As yet this is only my idea it is not completely myself. There are rifts in the armour through which something peeps out which is extremely soft and sensitive. Because, as I say, the best part of myself was created before I came to this stage of existence.

From time to time I try my followers in their lesson of cruelty. One day we went on a picnic. A goat was grazing by. I asked them: "Who is there among you that can cut off a leg of that goat, alive, with this knife, and bring it to me?" While they all hesitated, I went myself and did it. One of them fainted at the sight. But when they saw me unmoved they took the dust of my feet, saying that I was above all human weaknesses. That is to say, they saw that day the vaporous envelope which was my idea, but failed to perceive the inner me, which by a curious freak of fate has been created tender and merciful.

In the present chapter of my life, which is growing in interest every day round Bimala and Nikhil, there is also much that remains hidden underneath. This malady of ideas which afflicts me is shaping my life within: nevertheless a great part of my life remains outside its influence; and so there is set up a discrepancy between my outward life and its inner design which I try my best to keep concealed even from myself; otherwise it may wreck not only my plans, but my very life.

Life is indefinite a bundle of contradictions. We men, with our ideas, strive to give it a particular shape by melting it into a particular mould into the definiteness of success. All the world−conquerors, from Alexander down to the American millionaires, mould themselves into a sword or a mint, and thus find that distinct image of themselves which is the source of their success.

The chief controversy between Nikhil and myself arises from this: that though I say "know thyself", and Nikhil also says "know thyself", his interpretation makes this "knowing" tantamount to "not knowing".

"Winning your kind of success," Nikhil once objected, "is success gained at the cost of the soul: but the soul is greater than success."

I simply said in answer: "Your words are too vague."

"That I cannot help," Nikhil replied. "A machine is distinct enough, but not so life. If to gain distinctness you try to know life as a machine, then such mere distinctness cannot stand for truth. The soul is not as distinct as success, and so you only lose your soul if you seek it in your success."

"Where, then, is this wonderful soul?"

"Where it knows itself in the infinite and transcends its success."

"But how does all this apply to our work for the country?"

"It is the same thing. Where our country makes itself the final object, it gains success at the cost of the soul. Where it recognizes the Greatest as greater than all, there it may miss success, but gains its soul."

"Is there any example of this in history?"

"Man is so great that he can despise not only the success, but also the example. Possibly example is lacking, just as there is no example of the flower in the seed. But there is the urgence of the flower in the seed all the same."

It is not that I do not at all understand Nikhil's point of view; that is rather where my danger lies. I was born in India and the poison of its spirituality runs in my blood. However loudly I may proclaim the madness of walking in the path of self−abnegation, I cannot avoid it altogether.

This is exactly how such curious anomalies happen nowadays in our country. We must have our religion and also our nationalism; our *Bhagavadgita* and also our *Bande Mataram*. The result is that both of them suffer. It is like performing with an English military band, side by side with our Indian festive pipes. I must make it the purpose of my life to put an end to this hideous confusion.

I want the western military style to prevail, not the Indian. We shall then not be ashamed of the flag of our passion, which mother Nature has sent with us as our standard into the battlefield of life. Passion is beautiful and pure pure as the lily that comes out of the slimy soil. It rises superior to its defilement and needs no Pears' soap to wash it clean.

V

A question has been worrying me the last few days. Why am I allowing my life to become entangled with Bimala's? Am I a drifting log to be caught up at any and every obstacle?

Not that I have any false shame at Bimala becoming an object of my desire. It is only too clear how she wants me, and so I look on her as quite legitimately mine. The fruit hangs on the branch by the stem, but that is no reason why the claim of the stem should be eternal. Ripe fruit cannot for ever swear by its slackening stem−hold. All its sweetness has been accumulated for me; to surrender itself to my hand is the reason of its existence, its very nature, its true morality. So I must pluck it, for it becomes me not to make it futile.

But what is teasing me is that I am getting entangled. Am I not born to rule? to bestride my proper steed, the crowd, and drive it as I will; the reins in my hand, the destination known only to me, and for it the thorns, the mire, on the road? This steed now awaits me at the door, pawing and champing its bit, its neighing filling the skies. But where am I, and what am I about, letting day after day of golden opportunity slip by?

I used to think I was like a storm that the torn flowers with which I strewed my path would not impede my progress. But I am only wandering round and round a flower like a bee not a storm. So, as I was saying, the colouring of ideas which man gives himself is only superficial. The inner man remains as ordinary as ever. If someone, who could see right into me, were to write my biography, he would make me out to be no different from that lout of a Panchu, or even from Nikhil!

Last night I was turning over the pages of my old diary . . . I had just graduated, and my brain was bursting with philosophy. Even so early I had vowed not to harbour any illusions, whether of my own or others" imagining, but to build my life on a solid basis of reality. But what has since been its actual story? Where is its solidity? It has rather been a network, where, though the thread be continuous, more space is taken up by the holes. Fight as I may, these will not own defeat. Just as I was congratulating myself on steadily following the thread, here I am badly caught in a hole! For I have become susceptible to compunctions.

"I want it; it is here; let me take it" This is a clear−cut, straightforward policy. Those who can pursue its course with vigour needs must win through in the end. But the gods would not have it that such journey should be easy, so they have deputed the siren Sympathy to distract the wayfarer, to dim his vision with her tearful mist.

I can see that poor Bimala is struggling like a snared deer. What a piteous alarm there is in her eyes! How she is torn with straining at her bonds! This sight, of course, should gladden the heart of a true hunter. And so do I rejoice; but, then, I am also touched; and therefore I dally, and standing on the brink I am hesitating to pull the noose fast.

There have been moments, I know, when I could have bounded up to her, clasped her hands and folded her to my breast, unresisting. Had I done so, she would not have said one word. She was aware that some crisis was impending, which in a moment would change the meaning of the whole world. Standing before that cavern of the incalculable but yet expected, her face went pale and her eyes glowed with a fearful ecstasy. Within that moment, when it arrives, an eternity will take shape, which our destiny awaits, holding its breath.

But I have let this moment slip by. I did not, with uncompromising strength, press the almost certain into the absolutely assured. I now see clearly that some hidden elements in my nature have openly ranged themselves as obstacles in my path.

That is exactly how Ravana, whom I look upon as the real hero of the *Ramayana,* met with his doom. He kept Sita in his Asoka garden, awaiting her pleasure, instead of taking her straight into his harem. This weak spot in his otherwise grand character made the whole of the abduction episode futile. Another such touch of compunction made him disregard, and be lenient to, his traitorous brother Bibhisan, only to get himself killed for his pains.

Thus does the tragic in life come by its own. In the beginning it lies, a little thing, in some dark under−vault,

and ends by overthrowing the whole superstructure. The real tragedy is, that man does not know himself for what he really is.

VI

Then again there is Nikhil. Crank though he be, laugh at him as I may, I cannot get rid of the idea that he is my friend. At first I gave no thought to his point of view, but of late it has begun to shame and hurt me. Therefore I have been trying to talk and argue with him in the same enthusiastic way as of old, but it does not ring true. It is even leading me at times into such a length of unnaturalness as to pretend to agree with him. But such hypocrisy is not in my nature, nor in that of Nikhil either. This, at least, is something we have in common. That is why, nowadays, I would rather not come across him, and have taken to fighting shy of his presence.

All these are signs of weakness. No sooner is the possibility of a wrong admitted than it becomes actual, and clutches you by the throat, however you may then try to shake off all belief in it. What I should like to be able to tell Nikhil frankly is, that happenings such as these must be looked in the face as great Realities and that which is the Truth should not be allowed to stand between true friends.

There is no denying that I have really weakened. It was not this weakness which won over Bimala; she burnt her wings in the blaze of the full strength of my unhesitating manliness. Whenever smoke obscures its lustre she also becomes confused, and draws back. Then comes a thorough revulsion of feeling, and she fain would take back the garland she has put round my neck, but cannot; and so she only closes her eyes, to shut it out of sight.

But all the same I must not swerve from the path I have chalked out. It would never do to abandon the cause of the country, especially at the present time. I shall simply make Bimala one with my country. The turbulent west wind which has swept away the country's veil of conscience, will sweep away the veil of the wife from Bimala's face, and in that uncovering there will be no shame. The ship will rock as it bears the crowd across the ocean, flying the pennant of *Bande Mataram*, and it will serve as the cradle to my power, as well as to my love.

Bimala will see such a majestic vision of deliverance, that her bonds will slip from about her, without shame, without her even being aware of it. Fascinated by the beauty of this terrible wrecking power, she will not hesitate a moment to be cruel. I have seen in Bimala's nature the cruelty which is the inherent force of existence the cruelty which with its unrelenting might keeps the world beautiful.

If only women could be set free from the artificial fetters put round them by men, we could see on earth the living image of Kali, the shameless, pitiless goddess. I am a worshipper of Kali, and one day I shall truly worship her, setting Bimala on her altar of Destruction. For this let me get ready.

The way of retreat is absolutely closed for both of us. We shall despoil each other: get to hate each other: but never more be free.

Chapter Five

Nikhil's Story

IV

EVERYTHING is rippling and waving with the flood of August. The young shoots of rice have the sheen of an infant's limbs. The water has invaded the garden next to our house. The morning light, like the love of the blue sky, is lavished upon the earth . . . Why cannot I sing? The water of the distant river is shimmering with light; the leaves are glistening; the rice−fields, with their fitful shivers, break into gleams of gold; and in this symphony of Autumn, only I remain voiceless. The sunshine of the world strikes my heart, but is not reflected back.

When I realize the lack of expressiveness in myself, I know why I am deprived. Who could bear my company day and night without a break? Bimala is full of the energy of life, and so she has never become stale to me for a moment, in all these nine years of our wedded life.

My life has only its dumb depths; but no murmuring rush. I can only receive: not impart movement. And therefore my company is like fasting. I recognize clearly today that Bimala has been languishing because of a famine of companionship.

Then whom shall I blame? Like Vidyapati I can only lament:

> It is August, the sky breaks into a passionate rain;
> Alas, empty is my house.

My house, I now see, was built to remain empty, because its doors cannot open. But I never knew till now that its divinity had been sitting outside. I had fondly believed that she had accepted my sacrifice, and granted in return her boon. But, alas, my house has all along been empty.

Every year, about this time, it was our practice to go in a house−boat over the broads of Samalda. I used to tell Bimala that a song must come back to its refrain over and over again. The original refrain of every song is in Nature, where the rain−laden wind passes over the rippling stream, where the green earth, drawing its shadow−veil over its face, keeps its ear close to the speaking water. There, at the beginning of time, a man and a woman first met not within walls. And therefore we two must come back to Nature, at least once a year, to tune our love anew to the first pure note of the meeting of hearts.

The first two anniversaries of our married life I spent in Calcutta, where I went through my examinations. But from the next year onwards, for seven years without a break, we have celebrated our union among the blossoming water−lilies. Now begins the next octave of my life.

It was difficult for me to ignore the fact that the same month of August had come round again this year. Does Bimala remember it, I wonder? she has given me no reminder. Everything is mute about me.

> It is August, the sky breaks into a passionate rain;
> And empty is my house.

The house which becomes empty through the parting of lovers, still has music left in the heart of its emptiness. But the house that is empty because hearts are asunder, is awful in its silence. Even the cry of pain is out of place there.

This cry of pain must be silenced in me. So long as I continue to suffer, Bimala will never have true freedom. I must free her completely, otherwise I shall never gain my freedom from untruth . . .

I think I have come to the verge of understanding one thing. Man has so fanned the flame of the loves of men

and women, as to make it overpass its rightful domain, and now, even in the name of humanity itself, he cannot bring it back under control. Man's worship has idolized his passion. But there must be no more human sacrifices at its shrine . . .

I went into my bedroom this morning, to fetch a book. It is long since I have been there in the day−time. A pang passed through me as I looked round it today, in the morning light. On the clothes rack was hanging a *sari* of Bimala's, crinkled ready for wear. On the dressing−table were her perfumes, her comb, her hair−pins, and with them, still, her vermilion box! Underneath were her tiny gold−embroidered slippers.

Once, in the old days, when Bimala had not yet overcome her objections to shoes, I had got these out from Lucknow, to tempt her. The first time she was ready to drop for very shame, to go in them even from the room to the verandah. Since then she has worn out many shoes, but has treasured up this pair. When first showing her the slippers, I chaffed her over a curious practice of hers; "I have caught you taking the dust of my feet, thinking me asleep! These are the offerings of my worship to ward the dust off the feet of my wakeful divinity." "You must not say such things," she protested, "or I will never wear your shoes!"

This bedroom of mine it has a subtle atmosphere which goes straight to my heart. I was never aware, as I am today, how my thirsting heart has been sending out its roots to cling round each and every familiar object. The severing of the main root, I see, is not enough to set life free. Even these little slippers serve to hold one back.

My wandering eyes fall on the niche. My portrait there is looking the same as ever, in spite of the flowers scattered round it having been withered black! Of all the things in the room their greeting strikes me as sincere. They are still here simply because it was not felt worth while even to remove them. Never mind; let me welcome truth, albeit in such sere and sorry garb, and look forward to the time when I shall be able to do so unmoved, as does my photograph.

As I stood there, Bimal came in from behind. I hastily turned my eyes from the niche to the shelves as I muttered: "I came to get Amiel's Journal." What need had Ito volunteer an explanation? I felt like a wrong−doer, a trespasser, prying into a secret not meant for me. I could not look Bimal in the face, but hurried away.

V

I had just made the discovery that it was useless to keep up a pretence of reading in my room outside, and also that it was equally beyond me to busy myself attending to anything at all so that all the days of my future bid fair to congeal into one solid mass and settle heavily on my breast for good when Panchu, the tenant of a neighbouring *zamindar*, came up to me with a basketful of cocoa−nuts and greeted me with a profound obeisance.

"Well, Panchu," said I. "What is all this for?"

I had got to know Panchu through my master. He was extremely poor, nor was I in a position to do anything for him; so I supposed this present was intended to procure a tip to help the poor fellow to make both ends meet. I took some money from my purse and held it out towards him, but with folded hands he protested: "I cannot take that, sir!"

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Let me make a clean breast of it, sir. Once, when I was hard pressed, I stole some cocoa−nuts from the garden here. I am getting old, and may die any day, so I have come to pay them back."

Amiel's Journal could not have done me any good that day. But these words of Panchu lightened my heart. There are more things in life than the union or separation of man and woman. The great world stretches far beyond, and one can truly measure one's joys and sorrows when standing in its midst.

Panchu was devoted to my master. I know well enough how he manages to eke out a livelihood. He is up before dawn every day, and with a basket of *pan* leaves, twists of tobacco, coloured cotton yarn, little combs, looking−glasses, and other trinkets beloved of the village women, he wades through the knee−deep water of the marsh and goes over to the Namasudra quarters. There he barters his goods for rice, which fetches him a little more than their price in money. If he can get back soon enough he goes out again, after a hurried meal, to the sweetmeat seller's, where he assists in beating sugar for wafers. As soon as he comes home he sits at his shell−bangle making, plodding on often till midnight. All this cruel toil does not earn, for himself and his family, a bare two meals a day during much more than half the year. His method of eating is to begin with a good filling draught of water, and his staple food is the cheapest kind of seedy banana. And yet the family has to go with only one meal a day for the rest of the year.

At one time I had an idea of making him a charity allowance, "But," said my master, "your gift may destroy the man, it cannot destroy the hardship of his lot. Mother Bengal has not only this one Panchu. If the milk in her breasts has run dry, that cannot be supplied from the outside."

These are thoughts which give one pause, and I decided to devote myself to working it out. That very day I said to Bimal: "Let us dedicate our lives to removing the root of this sorrow in our country."

"You are my Prince Siddharta, [17] I see," she replied with a smile. "But do not let the torrent of your feelings end by sweeping me away also!"

"Siddharta took his vows alone. I want ours to be a joint arrangement."

The idea passed away in talk. The fact is, Bimala is at heart what is called a "lady". Though her own people are not well off, she was born a Rani. She has no doubts in her mind that there is a lower unit of measure for the trials and troubles of the "lower classes". Want is, of course, a permanent feature of their lives, but does not necessarily mean "want" to them. Their very smallness protects them, as the banks protect the pool; by widening bounds only the slime is exposed.

The real fact is that Bimala has only come into my home, not into my life. I had magnified her so, leaving her such a large place, that when I lost her, my whole way of life became narrow and confined. I had thrust aside all other objects into a corner to make room for Bimala taken up as I was with decorating her and dressing her and educating her and moving round her day and night; forgetting how great is humanity and how nobly precious is man's life. When the actualities of everyday things get the better of the man, then is Truth lost sight of and freedom missed. So painfully important did Bimala make the mere actualities, that the truth remained concealed from me. That is why I find no gap in my misery, and spread this minute point of my emptiness over all the world. And so, for hours on this Autumn morning, the refrain has been humming in my ears:

> It is the month of August, and the sky breaks into a passionate rain;
> Alas, my house is empty.

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17. The name by which Buddha was known when a Prince, before renouncing the world.

Bimala's Story

XI

The change which had, in a moment, come over the mind of Bengal was tremendous. It was as if the Ganges had touched the ashes of the sixty thousand sons of Sagar [18] which no fire could enkindle, no other water knead again into living clay. The ashes of lifeless Bengal suddenly spoke up: "Here am I."

I have read somewhere that in ancient Greece a sculptor had the good fortune to impart life to the image made by his own hand. Even in that miracle, however, there was the process of form preceding life. But where was the unity in this heap of barren ashes? Had they been hard like stone, we might have had hopes of some form emerging, even as Ahalya, though turned to stone, at last won back her humanity. But these scattered ashes must have dropped to the dust through gaps in the Creator's fingers, to be blown hither and thither by the wind. They had become heaped up, but were never before united. Yet in this day which had come to Bengal, even this collection of looseness had taken shape, and proclaimed in a thundering voice, at our very door: "Here I am."

How could we help thinking that it was all supernatural? This moment of our history seemed to have dropped into our hand like a jewel from the crown of some drunken god. It had no resemblance to our past; and so we were led to hope that all our wants and miseries would disappear by the spell of some magic charm, that for us there was no longer any boundary line between the possible and the impossible. Everything seemed to be saying to us: "It is coming; it has come!"

Thus we came to cherish the belief that our history needed no steed, but that like heaven's chariot it would move with its own inherent power At least no wages would have to be paid to the charioteer; only his wine cup would have to be filled again and again. And then in some impossible paradise the goal of our hopes would be reached.

My husband was not altogether unmoved, but through all our excitement it was the strain of sadness in him which deepened and deepened. He seemed to have a vision of something beyond the surging present.

I remember one day, in the course of the arguments he continually had with Sandip, he said: "Good fortune comes to our gate and announces itself, only to prove that we have not the power to receive it that we have not kept things ready to be able to invite it into our house."

"No," was Sandip's answer. "You talk like an atheist because you do not believe in our gods. To us it has been made quite visible that the Goddess has come with her boon, yet you distrust the obvious signs of her presence."

"It is because I strongly believe in my God," said my husband, "that I feel so certain that our preparations for his worship are lacking. God has power to give the boon, but we must have power to accept it."

This kind of talk from my husband would only annoy me. I could not keep from joining in: "You think this excitement is only a fire of drunkenness, but does not drunkenness, up to a point, give strength?"

"Yes," my husband replied. "It may give strength, but not weapons."

"But strength is the gift of God," I went on. "Weapons can be supplied by mere mechanics."

My husband smiled. "The mechanics will claim their wages before they deliver their supplies," he said.

Sandip swelled his chest as he retorted: "Don't you trouble about that. Their wages shall be paid."

"I shall bespeak the festive music when the payment has been made, not before," my husband answered.

"You needn't imagine that we are depending on your bounty for the music," said Sandip scornfully. "Our festival is above all money payments."

And in his thick voice he began to sing:

> "My lover of the unpriced love, spurning payments,
> Plays upon the simple pipe, bought for nothing,
> Drawing my heart away."

Then with a smile he turned to me and said: "If I sing, Queen Bee, it is only to prove that when music comes into one's life, the lack of a good voice is no matter. When we sing merely on the strength of our tunefulness, the song is belittled. Now that a full flood of music has swept over our country, let Nikhil practise his scales, while we rouse the land with our cracked voices:

> "My house cries to me: Why go out to lose your all?
> My life says: All that you have, fling to the winds!
> If we must lose our all, let us lose it: what is it worth after all?
> If I must court ruin, let me do it smilingly;
> For my quest is the death−draught of immortality.

"The truth is, Nikhil, that we have all lost our hearts. None can hold us any longer within the bounds of the easily possible, in our forward rush to the hopelessly impossible.

> "Those who would draw us back,
> They know not the fearful joy of recklessness.
> They know not that we have had our call
> From the end of the crooked path.
> All that is good and straight and trim
> Let it topple over in the dust."

I thought that my husband was going to continue the discussion, but he rose silently from his seat and left us.

The thing that was agitating me within was merely a variation of the stormy passion outside, which swept the country from one end to the other. The car of the wielder of my destiny was fast approaching, and the sound of its wheels reverberated in my being. I had a constant feeling that something extraordinary might happen any moment, for which, however, the responsibility would not be mine. Was I not removed from the plane in which right and wrong, and the feelings of others, have to be considered? Had I ever wanted this had I ever been waiting or hoping for any such thing? Look at my whole life and tell me then, if I was in any way accountable.

Through all my past I had been consistent in my devotion but when at length it came to receiving the boon, a different god appeared! And just as the awakened country, with its *Bande Mataram*, thrills in salutation to the unrealized future before it, so do all my veins and nerves send forth shocks of welcome to the unthought−of, the unknown, the importunate Stranger.

One night I left my bed and slipped out of my room on to the open terrace. Beyond our garden wall are fields of ripening rice. Through the gaps in the village groves to the North, glimpses of the river are seen. The

whole scene slept in the darkness like the vague embryo of some future creation.

In that future I saw my country, a woman like myself, standing expectant. She has been drawn forth from her home corner by the sudden call of some Unknown. She has had no time to pause or ponder, or to light herself a torch, as she rushes forward into the darkness ahead. I know well how her very soul responds to the distant flute−strains which call her; how her breast rises and falls; how she feels she nears it, nay it is already hers, so that it matters not even if she run blindfold. She is no mother. There is no call to her of children in their hunger, no home to be lighted of an evening, no household work to be done. So; she hies to her tryst, for this is the land of the Vaishnava Poets. She has left home, forgotten domestic duties; she has nothing but an unfathomable yearning which hurries her on by what road, to what goal, she recks not.

I, also, am possessed of just such a yearning. I likewise have lost my home and also lost my way. Both the end and the means have become equally shadowy to me. There remain only the yearning and the hurrying on. Ah! wretched wanderer through the night, when the dawn reddens you will see no trace of a way to return. But why return? Death will serve as well. If the Dark which sounded the flute should lead to destruction, why trouble about the hereafter? When I am merged in its blackness, neither I, nor good and bad, nor laughter, nor tears, shall be any more!

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18. The condition of the curse which had reduced them to ashes was such that they could only be restored to life if the stream of the Ganges was brought down to them. [Trans.].

XII

In Bengal the machinery of time being thus suddenly run at full pressure, things which were difficult became easy, one following soon after another. Nothing could be held back any more, even in our corner of the country. In the beginning our district was backward, for my husband was unwilling to put any compulsion on the villagers. "Those who make sacrifices for their country's sake are indeed her servants," he would say, "but those who compel others to make them in her name are her enemies. They would cut freedom at the root, to gain it at the top."

But when Sandip came and settled here, and his followers began to move about the country, speaking in towns and market−places, waves of excitement came rolling up to us as well. A band of young fellows of the locality attached themselves to him, some even who had been known as a disgrace to the village. But the glow of their genuine enthusiasm lighted them up, within as well as without. It became quite clear that when the pure breezes of a great joy and hope sweep through the land, all dirt and decay are cleansed away. It is hard, indeed, for men to be frank and straight and healthy, when their country is in the throes of dejection.

Then were all eyes turned on my husband, from whose estates alone foreign sugar and salt and cloths had not been banished. Even the estate officers began to feel awkward and ashamed over it. And yet, some time ago, when my husband began to import country−made articles into our village, he had been secretly and openly twitted for his folly, by old and young alike. When *Swadeshi* had not yet become a boast, we had despised it with all our hearts.

My husband still sharpens his Indian−made pencils with his Indian−made knife, does his writing with reed pens, drinks his water out of a bell−metal vessel, and works at night in the light of an old−fashioned castor−oil lamp. But this dull, milk−and−water *Swadeshi* of his never appealed to us. Rather, we had always felt ashamed of the inelegant, unfashionable furniture of his reception−rooms, especially when he had the magistrate, or any other European, as his guest.

My husband used to make light of my protests. "Why allow such trifles to upset you?" he would say with a smile.

"They will think us barbarians, or at all events wanting in refinement."

"If they do, I will pay them back by thinking that their refinement does not go deeper than their white skins."

My husband had an ordinary brass pot on his writing−table which he used as a flower−vase. It has often happened that, when I had news of some European guest, I would steal into his room and put in its place a crystal vase of European make. "Look here, Bimala," he objected at length, "that brass pot is as unconscious of itself as those blossoms are; but this thing protests its purpose so loudly, it is only fit for artificial flowers."

The Bara Rani, alone, pandered to my husband's whims. Once she comes panting to say: "Oh, brother, have you heard? Such lovely Indian soaps have come out! My days of luxury are gone by; still, if they contain no animal fat, I should like to try some."

This sort of thing makes my husband beam all over, and the house is deluged with Indian scents and soaps. Soaps indeed! They are more like lumps of caustic soda. And do I not know that what my sister−in−law uses on herself are the European soaps of old, while these are made over to the maids for washing clothes?

Another time it is: "Oh, brother dear, do get me some of these new Indian pen−holders."

Her "brother" bubbles up as usual, and the Bara Rani's room becomes littered with all kinds of awful sticks that go by the name of *Swadeshi* pen−holders. Not that it makes any difference to her, for reading and writing are out of her line. Still, in her writing−case, lies the selfsame ivory pen−holder, the only one ever handled.

The fact is, all this was intended as a hit at me, because I would not keep my husband company in his vagaries. It was no good trying to show up my sister−in−law's insincerity; my husband's face would set so hard, if I barely touched on it. One only gets into trouble, trying to save such people from being imposed upon!

The Bara Rani loves sewing. One day I could not help blurting out: "What a humbug you are, sister! When your 'brother' is present, your mouth waters at the very mention of *Swadeshi* scissors, but it is the English−made article every time when you work."

"What harm?" she replied. "Do you not see what pleasure it gives him? We have grown up together in this house, since he was a boy. I simply cannot bear, as you can, the sight of the smile leaving his face. Poor dear, he has no amusement except this playing at shop−keeping. You are his only dissipation, and you will yet be his ruin!"

"Whatever you may say, it is not right to be double−faced," I retorted.

My sister−in−law laughed out in my face. "Oh, our artless little Chota Rani! straight as a schoolmaster's rod, eh? But a woman is not built that way. She is soft and supple, so that she may bend without being crooked."

I could not forget those words: "You are his dissipation, and will be his ruin!" Today I feel if a man needs must have some intoxicant, let it not be a woman.

XIII

Suksar, within our estates, is one of the biggest trade centres in the district. On one side of a stretch of water there is held a daily bazar; on the other, a weekly market. During the rains when this piece of water gets connected with the river, and boats can come through, great quantities of cotton yarns, and woollen stuffs for the coming winter, are brought in for sale.

At the height of our enthusiasm, Sandip laid it down that all foreign articles, together with the demon of foreign influence, must be driven out of our territory.

"Of course!" said I, girding myself up for a fight.

"I have had words with Nikhil about it," said Sandip. "He tells me, he does not mind speechifying, but he will not have coercion."

"I will see to that," I said, with a proud sense of power. I knew how deep was my husband's love for me. Had I been in my senses I should have allowed myself to be torn to pieces rather than assert my claim to that, at such a time. But Sandip had to be impressed with the full strength of my *Shakti*.

Sandip had brought home to me, in his irresistible way, how the cosmic Energy was revealed for each individual in the shape of some special affinity. Vaishnava Philosophy, he said, speaks of the *Shakti* of Delight that dwells in the heart of creation, ever attracting the heart of her Eternal Lover. Men have a perpetual longing to bring out this *Shakti* from the hidden depths of their own nature, and those of us who succeed in doing so at once clearly understand the meaning of the music coming to us from the Dark. He broke out singing:

> "My flute, that was busy with its song,
> Is silent now when we stand face to face.
> My call went seeking you from sky to sky
>   When you lay hidden;
> But now all my cry finds its smile
>   In the face of my beloved."

Listening to his allegories, I had forgotten that I was plain and simple Bimala. I was *Shakti*; also an embodiment of Universal joy. Nothing could fetter me, nothing was impossible for me; whatever I touched would gain new life. The world around me was a fresh creation of mine; for behold, before my heart's response had touched it, there had not been this wealth of gold in the Autumn sky! And this hero, this true servant of the country, this devotee of mine this flaming intelligence, this burning energy, this shining genius him also was I creating from moment to moment. Have I not seen how my presence pours fresh life into him time after time?

The other day Sandip begged me to receive a young lad, Amulya, an ardent disciple of his. In a moment I could see a new light flash out from the boy's eyes, and knew that he, too, had a vision of *Shakti* manifest, that my creative force had begun its work in his blood. "What sorcery is this of yours!" exclaimed Sandip next day. "Amulya is a boy no longer, the wick of his life is all ablaze. Who can hide your fire under your home−roof? Every one of them must be touched up by it, sooner or later, and when every lamp is alight what a grand carnival of a *Dewali* we shall have in the country!"

Blinded with the brilliance of my own glory I had decided to grant my devotee this boon. I was overweeningly confident that none could baulk me of what I really wanted. When I returned to my room after my talk with Sandip, I loosed my hair and tied it up over again. Miss Gilby had taught me a way of brushing

it up from the neck and piling it in a knot over my head. This style was a favourite one with my husband. "It is a pity," he once said, "that Providence should have chosen poor me, instead of poet Kalidas, for revealing all the wonders of a woman's neck. The poet would probably have likened it to a flower−stem; but I feel it to be a torch, holding aloft the black flame of your hair." With which he . . . but why, oh why, do I go back to all that?

I sent for my husband. In the old days I could contrive a hundred and one excuses, good or bad, to get him to come to me. Now that all this had stopped for days I had lost the art of contriving.

Nikhil's Story

VI

Panchu's wife has just died of a lingering consumption. Panchu must undergo a purification ceremony to cleanse himself of sin and to propitiate his community. The community has calculated and informed him that it will cost one hundred and twenty−three rupees.

"How absurd!" I cried, highly indignant. "Don't submit to this, Panchu. What can they do to you?"

Raising to me his patient eyes like those of a tired−out beast of burden, he said: "There is my eldest girl, sir, she will have to be married. And my poor wife's last rites have to be put through."

"Even if the sin were yours, Panchu," I mused aloud, "you have surely suffered enough for it already."

"That is so, sir," he naïvely assented. "I had to sell part of my land and mortgage the rest to meet the doctor's bills. But there is no escape from the offerings I have to make the Brahmins."

What was the use of arguing? When will come the time, I wondered, for the purification of the Brahmins themselves who can accept such offerings?

After his wife's illness and funeral, Panchu, who had been tottering on the brink of starvation, went altogether beyond his depth. In a desperate attempt to gain consolation of some sort he took to sitting at the feet of a wandering ascetic, and succeeded in acquiring philosophy enough to forget that his children went hungry. He kept himself steeped for a time in the idea that the world is vanity, and if of pleasure it has none, pain also is a delusion. Then, at last, one night he left his little ones in their tumble−down hovel, and started off wandering on his own account.

I knew nothing of this at the time, for just then a veritable ocean−churning by gods and demons was going on in my mind. Nor did my master tell me that he had taken Panchu's deserted children under his own roof and was caring for them, though alone in the house, with his school to attend to the whole day.

After a month Panchu came back, his ascetic fervour considerably worn off. His eldest boy and girl nestled up to him, crying: "Where have you been all this time, father?" His youngest boy filled his lap; his second girl leant over his back with her arms around his neck; and they all wept together. "O sir!" sobbed Panchu, at length, to my master. "I have not the power to give these little ones enough to eat I am not free to run away from them. What has been my sin that I should be scourged so, bound hand and foot?"

In the meantime the thread of Panchu's little trade connections had snapped and he found he could not resume them. He clung on to the shelter of my master's roof, which had first received him on his return, and said not a word of going back home. "Look here, Panchu," my master was at last driven to say. "If you don't take care

of your cottage, it will tumble down altogether. I will lend you some money with which you can do a bit of peddling and return it me little by little."

Panchu was not excessively pleased was there then no such thing as charity on earth? And when my master asked him to write out a receipt for the money, he felt that this favour, demanding a return, was hardly worth having. My master, however, did not care to make an outward gift which would leave an inward obligation. To destroy self−respect is to destroy caste, was his idea.

After signing the note, Panchu's obeisance to my master fell off considerably in its reverence the dust−taking was left out. It made my master smile; he asked nothing better than that courtesy should stoop less low. "Respect given and taken truly balances the account between man and man," was the way he put it, "but veneration is overpayment."

Panchu began to buy cloth at the market and peddle it about the village. He did not get much of cash payment, it is true, but what he could realize in kind, in the way of rice, jute, and other field produce, went towards settlement of his account. In two months" time he was able to pay back an instalment of my master's debt, and with it there was a corresponding reduction in the depth of his bow. He must have begun to feel that he had been revering as a saint a mere man, who had not even risen superior to the lure of lucre.

While Panchu was thus engaged, the full shock of the *Swadeshi* flood fell on him.

VII

It was vacation time, and many youths of our village and its neighbourhood had come home from their schools and colleges. They attached themselves to Sandip's leadership with enthusiasm, and some, in their excess of zeal, gave up their studies altogether. Many of the boys had been free pupils of my school here, and some held college scholarships from me in Calcutta. They came up in a body, and demanded that I should banish foreign goods from my Suksar market.

I told them I could not do it.

They were sarcastic: "Why, Maharaja, will the loss be too much for you?"

I took no notice of the insult in their tone, and was about to reply that the loss would fall on the poor traders and their customers, not on me, when my master, who was present, interposed.

"Yes, the loss will be his not yours, that is clear enough," he said.

"But for one's country . ."

"The country does not mean the soil, but the men on it," interrupted my master again. "Have you yet wasted so much as a glance on what was happening to them? But now you would dictate what salt they shall eat, what clothes they shall wear. Why should they put up with such tyranny, and why should we let them?"

"But we have taken to Indian salt and sugar and cloth ourselves."

"You may do as you please to work off your irritation, to keep up your fanaticism. You are well off, you need not mind the cost. The poor do not want to stand in your way, but you insist on their submitting to your compulsion. As it is, every moment of theirs is a life−and−death struggle for a bare living; you cannot even imagine the difference a few pice means to them so little have you in common. You have spent your whole past in a superior compartment, and now you come down to use them as tools for the wreaking of your wrath.

I call it cowardly."

They were all old pupils of my master, so they did not venture to be disrespectful, though they were quivering with indignation. They turned to me. "Will you then be the only one, Maharaja, to put obstacles in the way of what the country would achieve?"

"Who am I, that I should dare do such a thing? Would I not rather lay down my life to help it?"

The M.A. student smiled a crooked smile, as he asked: "May we enquire what you are actually doing to help?"

"I have imported Indian mill−made yarn and kept it for sale in my Suksar market, and also sent bales of it to markets belonging to neighbouring *zamindar*s."

"But we have been to your market, Maharaja," the same student exclaimed, "and found nobody buying this yarn."

"That is neither my fault nor the fault of my market. It only shows the whole country has not taken your vow."

"That is not all," my master went on. "It shows that what you have pledged yourselves to do is only to pester others. You want dealers, who have not taken your vow, to buy that yarn; weavers, who have not taken your vow, to make it up; then their wares eventually to be foisted on to consumers who, also, have not taken your vow. The method? Your clamour, and the *zamindars'* oppression. The result: all righteousness yours, all privations theirs!"

"And may we venture to ask, further, what your share of the privation has been?" pursued a science student.

"You want to know, do you?" replied my master. "It is Nikhil himself who has to buy up that Indian mill yarn; he has had to start a weaving school to get it woven; and to judge by his past brilliant business exploits, by the time his cotton fabrics leave the loom their cost will be that of cloth−of−gold; so they will only find a use, perhaps, as curtains for his drawing−room, even though their flimsiness may fail to screen him. When you get tired of your vow, you will laugh the loudest at their artistic effect. And if their workmanship is ever truly appreciated at all, it will be by foreigners."

I have known my master all my life, but have never seen him so agitated. I could see that the pain had been silently accumulating in his heart for some time, because of his surpassing love for me, and that his habitual self−possession had become secretly undermined to the breaking point.

"You are our elders," said the medical student. "It is unseemly that we should bandy words with you. But tell us, pray, finally, are you determined not to oust foreign articles from your market?"

"I will not," I said, "because they are not mine."

"Because that will cause you a loss!" smiled the M.A. student.

"Because he, whose is the loss, is the best judge," retorted my master.

With a shout of *Bande Mataram* they left us.

Chapter Six. Nikhil's Story

VIII

A FEW days later, my master brought Panchu round to me. His *zamindar*, it appeared, had fined him a hundred rupees, and was threatening him with ejectment.

"For what fault?" I enquired.

"Because," I was told, "he has been found selling foreign cloths. He begged and prayed Harish Kundu, his *zamindar*, to let him sell off his stock, bought with borrowed money, promising faithfully never to do it again; but the *zamindar* would not hear of it, and insisted on his burning the foreign stuff there and then, if he wanted to be let off. Panchu in his desperation blurted out defiantly: "I can't afford it! You are rich; why not buy it up and burn it?" This only made Harish Kundu red in the face as he shouted: "The scoundrel must be taught manners, give him a shoe−beating!" So poor Panchu got insulted as well as fined."

"What happened to the cloth?"

"The whole bale was burnt."

"Who else was there?"

"Any number of people, who all kept shouting *Bande Mataram.* Sandip was also there. He took up some of the ashes, crying: 'Brothers! This is the first funeral pyre lighted by your village in celebration of the last rites of foreign commerce. These are sacred ashes. Smear yourselves with them in token of your *Swadeshi* vow.'"

"Panchu," said I, turning to him, "you must lodge a complaint."

"No one will bear me witness," he replied.

"None bear witness? Sandip! Sandip!"

Sandip came out of his room at my call. "What is the matter?" he asked.

"Won't you bear witness to the burning of this man's cloth?"

Sandip smiled. "Of course I shall be a witness in the case," he said. "But I shall be on the opposite side."

"What do you mean," I exclaimed, "by being a witness on this or that side? Will you not bear witness to the truth?"

"Is the thing which happens the only truth?"

"What other truths can there be?"

"The things that ought to happen! The truth we must build up will require a great deal of untruth in the process. Those who have made their way in the world have created truth, not blindly followed it."

"And so "

"And so I will bear what you people are pleased to call false witness, as they have done who have created empires, built up social systems, founded religious organizations. Those who would rule do not dread untruths; the shackles of truth are reserved for those who will fall under their sway. Have you not read history? Do you not know that in the immense cauldrons, where vast political developments are simmering, untruths are the main ingredients?"

"Political cookery on a large scale is doubtless going on, but "

"Oh, I know! You, of course, will never do any of the cooking. You prefer to be one of those down whose throats the hotchpotch which is being cooked will be crammed. They will partition Bengal and say it is for your benefit. They will seal the doors of education and call it raising the standard. But you will always remain good boys, snivelling in your corners. We bad men, however, must see whether we cannot erect a defensive fortification of untruth."

"It is no use arguing about these things, Nikhil," my master interposed. "How can they who do not feel the truth within them, realize that to bring it out from its obscurity into the light is man's highest aim not to keep on heaping material outside?"

Sandip laughed. "Right, sir!" said he. "Quite a correct speech for a schoolmaster. That is the kind of stuff I have read in books; but in the real world I have seen that man's chief business is the accumulation of outside material. Those who are masters in the art, advertise the biggest lies in their business, enter false accounts in their political ledgers with their broadest−pointed pens, launch their newspapers daily laden with untruths, and send preachers abroad to disseminate falsehood like flies carrying pestilential germs. I am a humble follower of these great ones. When I was attached to the Congress party I never hesitated to dilute ten per cent of truth with ninety per cent of untruth. And now, merely because I have ceased to belong to that party, I have not forgotten the basic fact that man's goal is not truth but success."

"True success," corrected my master.

"Maybe," replied Sandip, "but the fruit of true success ripens only by cultivating the field of untruth, after tearing up the soil and pounding it into dust. Truth grows up by itself like weeds and thorns, and only worms can expect to get fruit from it!" With this he flung out of the room.

My master smiled as he looked towards me. "Do you know, Nikhil," he said, "I believe Sandip is not irreligious his religion is of the obverse side of truth, like the dark moon, which is still a moon, for all that its light has gone over to the wrong side."

"That is why," I assented, "I have always had an affection for him, though we have never been able to agree. I cannot contemn him, even now; though he has hurt me sorely, and may yet hurt me more."

"I have begun to realize that," said my master. "I have long wondered how you could go on putting up with him. I have, at times, even suspected you of weakness. I now see that though you two do not rhyme, your rhythm is the same."

"Fate seems bent on writing *Paradise Lost* in blank verse, in my case, and so has no use for a rhyming friend!" I remarked, pursuing his conceit.

"But what of Panchu?" resumed my master.

"You say Harish Kundu wants to eject him from his ancestral holding. Supposing I buy it up and then keep him on as my tenant?"

"And his fine?"

"How can the *zamindar* realize that if he becomes my tenant?"

"His burnt bale of cloth?"

"I will procure him another. I should like to see anyone interfering with a tenant of mine, for trading as he pleases!"

"I am afraid, sir," interposed Panchu despondently, "while you big folk are doing the fighting, the police and the law vultures will merrily gather round, and the crowd will enjoy the fun, but when it comes to getting killed, it will be the turn of only poor me!"

"Why, what harm can come to you?"

"They will burn down my house, sir, children and all!"

"Very well, I will take charge of your children," said my master. "You may go on with any trade you like. They shan't touch you."

That very day I bought up Panchu's holding and entered into formal possession. Then the trouble began.

Panchu had inherited the holding of his grandfather as his sole surviving heir. Everybody knew this. But at this juncture an aunt turned up from somewhere, with her boxes and bundles, her rosary, and a widowed niece. She ensconced herself in Panchu's home and laid claim to a life interest in all he had.

Panchu was dumbfounded. "My aunt died long ago," he protested.

In reply he was told that he was thinking of his uncle's first wife, but that the former had lost no time in taking to himself a second.

"But my uncle died before my aunt," exclaimed Panchu, still more mystified. "Where was the time for him to marry again?"

This was not denied. But Panchu was reminded that it had never been asserted that the second wife had come after the death of the first, but the former had been married by his uncle during the latter's lifetime. Not relishing the idea of living with a co−wife she had remained in her father's house till her husband's death, after which she had got religion and retired to holy Brindaban, whence she was now coming. These facts were well known to the officers of Harish Kundu, as well as to some of his tenants. And if the *zamindar*'s summons should be peremptory enough, even some of those who had partaken of the marriage feast would be forthcoming!

IX

One afternoon, when I happened to be specially busy, word came to my office room that Bimala had sent for me. I was startled.

"Who did you say had sent for me?" I asked the messenger.

"The Rani Mother."

"The Bara Rani?"

"No, sir, the Chota Rani Mother."

The Chota Rani! It seemed a century since I had been sent for by her. I kept them all waiting there, and went off into the inner apartments. When I stepped into our room I had another shock of surprise to find Bimala there with a distinct suggestion of being dressed up. The room, which from persistent neglect had latterly acquired an air of having grown absent−minded, had regained something of its old order this afternoon. I stood there silently, looking enquiringly at Bimala.

She flushed a little and the fingers of her right hand toyed for a time with the bangles on her left arm. Then she abruptly broke the silence. "Look here! Is it right that ours should be the only market in all Bengal which allows foreign goods?"

"What, then, would be the right thing to do?" I asked.

"Order them to be cleared out!"

"But the goods are not mine."

"Is not the market yours?"

"It is much more theirs who use it for trade."

"Let them trade in Indian goods, then."

"Nothing would please me better. But suppose they do not?"

"Nonsense! How dare they be so insolent? Are you not . . ."

"I am very busy this afternoon and cannot stop to argue it out. But I must refuse to tyrannize."

"It would not be tyranny for selfish gain, but for the sake of the country."

"To tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country. But that I am afraid you will never understand." With this I came away.

All of a sudden the world shone out for me with a fresh clearness. I seemed to feel it in my blood, that the Earth had lost the weight of its earthiness, and its daily task of sustaining life no longer appeared a burden, as with a wonderful access of power it whirled through space telling its beads of days and nights. What endless work, and withal what illimitable energy of freedom! None shall check it, oh, none can ever check it! From the depths of my being an uprush of joy, like a waterspout, sprang high to storm the skies.

I repeatedly asked myself the meaning of this outburst of feeling. At first there was no intelligible answer. Then it became clear that the bond against which I had been fretting inwardly, night and day, had broken. To my surprise I discovered that my mind was freed from all mistiness. I could see everything relating to Bimala as if vividly pictured on a camera screen. It was palpable that she had specially dressed herself up to coax that order out of me. Till that moment, I had never viewed Bimala's adornment as a thing apart from herself. But today the elaborate manner in which she had done up her hair, in the English fashion, made it appear a mere decoration. That which before had the mystery of her personality about it, and was priceless to me, was now out to sell itself cheap.

As I came away from that broken cage of a bedroom, out into the golden sunlight of the open, there was the avenue of bauhinias, along the gravelled path in front of my verandah, suffusing the sky with a rosy flush. A group of starlings beneath the trees were noisily chattering away. In the distance an empty bullock cart, with its nose on the ground, held up its tail aloft one of its unharnessed bullocks grazing, the other resting on the grass, its eyes dropping for very comfort, while a crow on its back was pecking away at the insects on its body.

I seemed to have come closer to the heartbeats of the great earth in all the simplicity of its daily life; its warm breath fell on me with the perfume of the bauhinia blossoms; and an anthem, inexpressibly sweet, seemed to peal forth from this world, where I, in my freedom, live in the freedom of all else.

We, men, are knights whose quest is that freedom to which our ideals call us. She who makes for us the banner under which we fare forth is the true Woman for us. We must tear away the disguise of her who weaves our net of enchantment at home, and know her for what she is. We must beware of clothing her in the witchery of our own longings and imaginings, and thus allow her to distract us from our true quest.

Today I feel that I shall win through. I have come to the gateway of the simple; I am now content to see things as they are. I have gained freedom myself; I shall allow freedom to others. In my work will be my salvation.

I know that, time and again, my heart will ache, but now that I understand its pain in all its truth, I can disregard it. Now that I know it concerns only me, what after all can be its value? The suffering which belongs to all mankind shall be my crown.

Save me, Truth! Never again let me hanker after the false paradise of Illusion. If I must walk alone, let me at least tread your path. Let the drum−beats of Truth lead me to Victory.

Sandip's Story

VII

Bimala sent for me that day, but for a time she could not utter a word; her eyes kept brimming up to the verge of overflowing. I could see at once that she had been unsuccessful with Nikhil. She had been so proudly confident that she would have her own way but I had never shared her confidence. Woman knows man well enough where he is weak, but she is quite unable to fathom him where he is strong. The fact is that man is as much a mystery to woman as woman is to man. If that were not so, the separation of the sexes would only have been a waste of Nature's energy.

Ah pride, pride! The trouble was, not that the necessary thing had failed of accomplishment, but that the entreaty, which had cost her such a struggle to make, should have been refused. What a wealth of colour and movement, suggestion and deception, group themselves round this "me" and "mine" in woman. That is just where her beauty lies she is ever so much more personal than man. When man was being made, the Creator was a schoolmaster His bag full of commandments and principles; but when He came to woman, He resigned His headmastership and turned artist, with only His brush and paint−box.

When Bimala stood silently there, flushed and tearful in her broken pride, like a storm−cloud, laden with rain and charged with lightning, lowering over the horizon, she looked so absolutely sweet that I had to go right up to her and take her by the hand. It was trembling, but she did not snatch it away. "Bee," said I, "we two are colleagues, for our aims are one. Let us sit down and talk it over."

I led her, unresisting, to a seat. But strange! at that very point the rush of my impetuosity suffered an unaccountable check just as the current of the mighty Padma, roaring on in its irresistible course, all of a sudden gets turned away from the bank it is crumbling by some trifling obstacle beneath the surface. When I pressed Bimala's hand my nerves rang music, like tuned−up strings; but the symphony stopped short at the first movement.

What stood in the way? Nothing singly; it was a tangle of a multitude of things nothing definitely palpable, but only that unaccountable sense of obstruction. Anyhow, this much has become plain to me, that I cannot swear to what I really am. It is because I am such a mystery to my own mind that my attraction for myself is so strong! If once the whole of myself should become known to me, I would then fling it all away and reach beatitude!

As she sat down, Bimala went ashy pale. She, too, must have realized what a crisis had come and gone, leaving her unscathed. The comet had passed by, but the brush of its burning tail had overcome her. To help her to recover herself I said: "Obstacles there will be, but let us fight them through, and not be down−hearted. Is not that best, Queen?"

Bimala cleared her throat with a little cough, but simply to murmur: "Yes."

"Let us sketch out our plan of action," I continued, as I drew a piece of paper and a pencil from my pocket.

I began to make a list of the workers who had joined us from Calcutta and to assign their duties to each. Bimala interrupted me before I was through, saying wearily: "Leave it now; I will join you again this evening" and then she hurried out of the room. It was evident she was not in a state to attend to anything. She must be alone with herself for a while perhaps lie down on her bed and have a good cry!

When she left me, my intoxication began to deepen, as the cloud colours grow richer after the sun is down. I felt I had let the moment of moments slip by. What an awful coward I had been! She must have left me in sheer disgust at my qualms and she was right!

While I was tingling all over with these reflections, a servant came in and announced Amulya, one of our boys. I felt like sending him away for the time, but he stepped in before I could make up my mind. Then we fell to discussing the news of the fights which were raging in different quarters over cloth and sugar and salt; and the air was soon clear of all fumes of intoxication. I felt as if awakened from a dream. I leapt to my feet feeling quite ready for the fray Bande Mataram!

The news was various. Most of the traders who were tenants of Harish Kundu had come over to us. Many of Nikhil's officials were also secretly on our side, pulling the wires in our interest. The Marwari shopkeepers were offering to pay a penalty, if only allowed to clear their present stocks. Only some Mahomedan traders were still obdurate.

One of them was taking home some German−made shawls for his family. These were confiscated and burnt by one of our village boys. This had given rise to trouble. We offered to buy him Indian woollen stuffs in their place. But where were cheap Indian woollens to be had? We could not very well indulge him in Cashmere shawls! He came and complained to Nikhil, who advised him to go to law. Of course Nikhil's men saw to it that the trial should come to nothing, even his law−agent being on our side!

The point is, if we have to replace burnt foreign clothes with Indian cloth every time, and on the top of that fight through a law−suit, where is the money to come from? And the beauty of it is that this destruction of foreign goods is increasing their demand and sending up the foreigner's profits very like what happened to the fortunate shopkeeper whose chandeliers the nabob delighted in smashing, tickled by the tinkle of the

breaking glass.

The next problem is since there is no such thing as cheap and gaudy Indian woollen stuff, should we be rigorous in our boycott of foreign flannels and memos, or make an exception in their favour?

"Look here!" said I at length on the first point, "we are not going to keep on making presents of Indian stuff to those who have got their foreign purchases confiscated. The penalty is intended to fall on them, not on us. If they go to law, we must retaliate by burning down their granaries! What startles you, Amulya? It is not the prospect of a grand illumination that delights me! You must remember, this is War. If you are afraid of causing suffering, go in for love−making, you will never do for this work!"

The second problem I solved by deciding to allow no compromise with foreign articles, in any circumstance whatever. In the good old days, when these gaily coloured foreign shawls were unknown, our peasantry used to manage well enough with plain cotton quilts they must learn to do so again. They may not look as gorgeous, but this is not the time to think of looks.

Most of the boatmen had been won over to refuse to carry foreign goods, but the chief of them, Mirjan, was still insubordinate.

"Could you not get his boat sunk?" I asked our manager here.

"Nothing easier, sir," he replied. "But what if afterwards I am held responsible?"

"Why be so clumsy as to leave any loophole for responsibility? However, if there must be any, my shoulders will be there to bear it."

Mirjan's boat was tied near the landing−place after its freight had been taken over to the market−place. There was no one on it, for the manager had arranged for some entertainment to which all had been invited. After dusk the boat, loaded with rubbish, was holed and set adrift. It sank in mid−stream.

Mirjan understood the whole thing. He came to me in tears to beg for mercy. "I was wrong, sir " he began.

"What makes you realize that all of a sudden?" I sneered.

He made no direct reply. "The boat was worth two thousand rupees," he said. "I now see my mistake, and if excused this time I will never . . ." with which he threw himself at my feet.

I asked him to come ten days later. If only we could pay him that two thousand rupees at once, we could buy him up body and soul. This is just the sort of man who could render us immense service, if won over. We shall never be able to make any headway unless we can lay our hands on plenty of money.

As soon as Bimala came into the sitting−room, in the evening, I said as I rose up to receive her: "Queen! Everything is ready, success is at hand, but we must have money.

"Money? How much money?"

"Not so very much, but by hook or by crook we must have it!"

"But how much?"

"A mere fifty thousand rupees will do for the present."

Bimala blenched inwardly at the figure, but tried not to show it. How could she again admit defeat?

"Queen!" said I, "you only can make the impossible possible. Indeed you have already done so. Oh, that I could show you the extent of your achievement then you would know it. But the time for that is not now. Now we want money!"

"You shall have it," she said.

I could see that the thought of selling her jewels had occurred to her. So I said: "Your jewels must remain in reserve. One can never tell when they may be wanted." And then, as Bimala stared blankly at me in silence, I went on: "This money must come from your husband's treasury."

Bimala was still more taken aback. After a long pause she said: "But how am Ito get his money?"

"Is not his money yours as well?"

"Ah, no!" she said, her wounded pride hurt afresh.

"If not," I cried, "neither is it his, but his country's, whom he has deprived of it, in her time of need!"

"But how am Ito get it?" she repeated.

"Get it you shall and must. You know best how. You must get it for Her to whom it rightfully belongs. *Bande Mataram*! These are the magic words which will open the door of his iron safe, break through the walls of his strong−room, and confound the hearts of those who are disloyal to its call. Say *Bande Mataram*, Bee!"

"*Bande Mataram*!"

Chapter Seven. Sandip's Story

VIII

WE are men, we are kings, we must have our tribute. Ever since we have come upon the Earth we have been plundering her; and the more we claimed, the more she submitted. From primeval days have we men been plucking fruits, cutting down trees, digging up the soil, killing beast, bird and fish. From the bottom of the sea, from underneath the ground, from the very jaws of death, it has all been grabbing and grabbing and grabbing no strong−box in Nature's store−room has been respected or left unrifled. The one delight of this Earth is to fulfil the claims of those who are men. She has been made fertile and beautiful and complete through her endless sacrifices to them. But for this, she would be lost in the wilderness, not knowing herself, the doors of her heart shut, her diamonds and pearls never seeing the light.

Likewise, by sheer force of our claims, we men have opened up all the latent possibilities of women. In the process of surrendering themselves to us, they have ever gained their true greatness. Because they had to bring all the diamonds of their happiness and the pearls of their sorrow into our royal treasury, they have found their true wealth. So for men to accept is truly to give: for women to give is truly to gain.

The demand I have just made from Bimala, however, is indeed a large one! At first I felt scruples; for is it not the habit of man's mind to be in purposeless conflict with itself? I thought I had imposed too hard a task. My first impulse was to call her back, and tell her I would rather not make her life wretched by dragging her into all these troubles. I forgot, for the moment, that it was the mission of man to be aggressive, to make woman's

existence fruitful by stirring up disquiet in the depth of her passivity, to make the whole world blessed by churning up the immeasurable abyss of suffering! This is why man's hands are so strong, his grip so firm. Bimala had been longing with all her heart that I, Sandip, should demand of her some great sacrifice should call her to her death. How else could she be happy? Had she not waited all these weary years only for an opportunity to weep out her heart so satiated was she with the monotony of her placid happiness? And therefore, at the very sight of me, her heart's horizon darkened with the rain clouds of her impending days of anguish. If I pity her and save her from her sorrows, what then was the purpose of my being born a man?

The real reason of my qualms is that my demand happens to be for money. That savours of beggary, for money is man's, not woman's. That is why I had to make it a big figure. A thousand or two would have the air of petty theft. Fifty thousand has all the expanse of romantic brigandage. Ah, but riches should really have been mine! So many of my desires have had to halt, again and again, on the road to accomplishment simply for want of money. This does not become me! Had my fate been merely unjust, it could be forgiven but its bad taste is unpardonable. It is not simply a hardship that a man like me should be at his wit's end to pay his house rent, or should have to carefully count out the coins for an Intermediate Class railway ticket it is vulgar!

It is equally clear that Nikhil's paternal estates are a superfluity to him. For him it would not have been at all unbecoming to be poor. He would have cheerfully pulled in the double harness of indigent mediocrity with that precious master of his. I should love to have, just for once, the chance to fling about fifty thousand rupees in the service of my country and to the satisfaction of myself. I am a nabob born, and it is a great dream of mine to get rid of this disguise of poverty, though it be for a day only, and to see myself in my true character. I have grave misgivings, however, as to Bimala ever getting that fifty thousand rupees within her reach, and it will probably be only a thousand or two which will actually come to hand. Be it so. The wise man is content with half a loaf, or any fraction for that matter, rather than no bread. I must return to these personal reflections of mine later. News comes that I am wanted at once. Something has gone wrong . . .

It seems that the police have got a clue to the man who sank Mirjan's boat for us. He was an old offender. They are on his trail, but he should be too practised a hand to be caught blabbing. However, one never knows. Nikhil's back is up, and his manager may not be able to have things his own way.

"If I get into trouble, sir," said the manager when I saw him, "I shall have to drag you in!"

"Where is the noose with which you can catch me?" I asked.

"I have a letter of yours, and several of Amulya Babu's." I could not see that the letter marked "urgent" to which I had been hurried into writing a reply was wanted urgently for this purpose only! I am getting to learn quite a number of things.

The point now is, that the police must be bribed and hush−money paid to Mirjan for his boat. It is also becoming evident that much of the cost of this patriotic venture of ours will find its way as profit into the pockets of Nikhil's manager. However, I must shut my eyes to that for the present, for is he not shouting *Bande Mataram* as lustily as I am?

This kind of work has always to be carried on with leaky vessels which let as much through as they fetch in. We all have a hidden fund of moral judgement stored away within us, and so I was about to wax indignant with the manager, and enter in my diary a tirade against the unreliability of our countrymen. But, if there be a god, I must acknowledge with gratitude to him that he has given me a clear−seeing mind, which allows nothing inside or outside it to remain vague. 1 may delude others, but never myself. So I was unable to continue angry.

Whatever is true is neither good nor bad, but simply true, and that is Science. A lake is only the remnant of water which has not been sucked into the ground. Underneath the cult of *Bande Mataram*, as indeed at the bottom of all mundane affairs, there is a region of slime, whose absorbing power must be reckoned with. The manager will take what he wants; I also have my own wants. These lesser wants form a part of the wants of the great Cause the horse must be fed and the wheels must be oiled if the best progress is to be made.

The long and short of it is that money we must have, and that soon. We must take whatever comes the readiest, for we cannot afford to wait. I know that the immediate often swallows up the ultimate; that the five thousand rupees of today may nip in the bud the fifty thousand rupees of tomorrow. But I must accept the penalty. Have I not often twitted Nikhil that they who walk in the paths of restraint have never known what sacrifice is? It is we greedy folk who have to sacrifice our greed at every step!

Of the cardinal sins of man, Desire is for men who are men but Delusion, which is only for cowards, hampers them. Because delusion keeps them wrapped up in past and future, but is the very deuce for confounding their footsteps in the present. Those who are always straining their ears for the call of the remote, to the neglect of the call of the imminent, are like Sakuntala [19] absorbed in the memories of her lover. The guest comes unheeded, and the curse descends, depriving them of the very object of their desire.

The other day I pressed Bimala's hand, and that touch still stirs her mind, as it vibrates in mine. Its thrill must not be deadened by repetition, for then what is now music will descend to mere argument. There is at present no room in her mind for the question "why?" So I must not deprive Bimala, who is one of those creatures for whom illusion is necessary, of her full supply of it.

As for me, I have so much else to do that I shall have to be content for the present with the foam of the wine cup of passion. O man of desire! Curb your greed, and practise your hand on the harp of illusion till you can bring out all the delicate nuances of suggestion. This is not the time to drain the cup to the dregs.

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19. Sakuntala, after the king, her lover, went back to his kingdom, promising to send for her, was so lost in thoughts of him, that she failed to hear the call of her hermit guest. who thereupon cursed her, saying that the object of her love would forget all about her. [Trans.].

IX

Our work proceeds apace. But though we have shouted ourselves hoarse, proclaiming the Mussulmans to be our brethren, we have come to realize that we shall never be able to bring them wholly round to our side. So they must be suppressed altogether and made to understand that we are the masters. They are now showing their teeth, but one day they shall dance like tame bears to the tune we play.

"If the idea of a United India is a true one," objects Nikhil, "Mussulmans are a necessary part of it."

"Quite so," said I, "but we must know their place and keep them there, otherwise they will constantly be giving trouble."

"So you want to make trouble to prevent trouble?"

"What, then, is your plan?"

"There is only one well−known way of avoiding quarrels," said Nikhil meaningly.

I know that, like tales written by good people, Nikhil's discourse always ends in a moraL The strange part of it is that with all his familiarity with moral precepts, he still believes in them! He is an incorrigible schoolboy. His only merit is his sincerity. The mischief with people like him is that they will not admit the finality even of death, but keep their eyes always fixed on a hereafter.

I have long been nursing a plan which, if only I could carry it out, would set fire to the whole country. True patriotism will never be roused in our countrymen unless they can visualize the motherland. We must make a goddess of her. My colleagues saw the point at once. "Let us devise an appropriate image!" they exclaimed. "It will not do if you devise− it," I admonished them. "We must get one of the current images accepted as representing the country the worship of the people must flow towards it along the deep−cut grooves of custom."

But Nikhil's needs must argue even about this. "We must not seek the help of illusions," he said to me some time ago,

"for what we believe to be the true cause."

"Illusions are necessary for lesser minds," I said, "and to this class the greater portion of the world belongs. That is why divinities are set up in every country to keep up the illusions of the people, for men are only too well aware of their weakness."

"No," he replied. "God is necessary to clear away our illusions. The divinities which keep them alive are false gods."

"What of that? If need be, even false gods must be invoked, rather than let the work suffer. Unfortunately for us, our illusions are alive enough, but we do not know how to make them serve our purpose. Look at the Brahmins. In spite of our treating them as demi−gods, and untiringly taking the dust of their feet, they are a force going to waste.

"There will always be a large class of people, given to grovelling, who can never be made to do anything unless they are bespattered with the dust of somebody's feet, be it on their heads or on their backs! What a pity if after keeping Brahmins saved up in our armoury for all these ages keen and serviceable they cannot be utilized to urge on this rabble in the time of our need."

But it is impossible to drive all this into Nikhil's head. He has such a prejudice in favour of truth as though there exists such an objective reality! How often have I tried to explain to him that where untruth truly exists, there it is indeed the truth. This was understood in our country in the old days, and so they had the courage to declare that for those of little understanding untruth is the truth. For them, who can truly believe their country to be a goddess, her image will do duty for the truth. With our nature and our traditions we are unable to realize our country as she is, but we can easily bring ourselves to believe in her image. Those who want to do real work must not ignore this fact.

Nikhil only got excited. "Because you have lost the power of walking in the path of truth's attainment," he cried, "you keep waiting for some miraculous boon to drop from the skies! That is why when your service to the country has fallen centuries into arrears all you can think of is, to make of it an image and stretch out your hands in expectation of gratuitous favours."

"We want to perform the impossible," I said. "So our country needs must be made into a god."

"You mean you have no heart for possible tasks," replied Nikhil. "Whatever is already there is to be left undisturbed; yet there must be a supernatural result:"

"Look here, Nikhil," I said at length, thoroughly exasperated.

"The things you have been saying are good enough as moral lessons. These ideas have served their purpose, as milk for babes, at one stage of man's evolution, but will no longer do, now that man has cut his teeth.

"Do we not see before our very eyes how things, of which we never even dreamt of sowing the seed, are sprouting up on every side? By what power? That of the deity in our country who is becoming manifest. It is for the genius of the age to give that deity its image. Genius does not argue, it creates. I only give form to what the country imagines.

"I will spread it abroad that the goddess has vouchsafed me a dream. I will tell the Brahmins that they have been appointed her priests, and that their downfall has been due to their dereliction of duty in not seeing to the proper performance of her worship. Do you say I shall be uttering lies? No, say I, it is the truth nay more, the truth which the country has so long been waiting to learn from my lips. If only I could get the opportunity to deliver my message, you would see the stupendous result."

"What I am afraid of," said Nikhil, "is, that my lifetime is limited and the result you speak of is not the final result. It will have after−effects which may not be immediately apparent."

"I only seek the result," said I, "which belongs to today."

"The result I seek," answered Nikhil, "belongs to all time."

Nikhil may have had his share of Bengal's greatest gift imagination, but he has allowed it to be overshadowed and nearly killed by an exotic conscientiousness. Just look at the worship of Durga which Bengal has carried to such heights. That is one of her greatest achievements. I can swear that Durga is a political goddess and was conceived as the image of the *Shakti* of patriotism in the days when Bengal was praying to be delivered from Mussulman domination. What other province of India has succeeded in giving such wonderful visual expression to the ideal of its quest?

Nothing betrayed Nikhil's loss of the divine gift of imagination more conclusively than his reply to me. "During the Mussulman domination," he said, "the Maratha and the Sikh asked for fruit from the arms which they themselves took up. The Bengali contented himself with placing weapons in the hands of his goddess and muttering incantations to her; and as his country did not really happen to be a goddess the only fruit he got was the lopped−off heads of the goats and buffaloes of the sacrifice. The day that we seek the good of the country along the path of righteousness, He who is greater than our country will grant us true fruition."

The unfortunate part of it is that Nikhil's words sound so fine when put down on paper. My words, however, are not meant to be scribbled on paper, but to be scored into the heart of the country. The Pandit records his Treatise on Agriculture in printer's ink; but the cultivator at the point of his plough impresses his endeavour deep in the soil.

X

When I next saw Bimala I pitched my key high without further ado. "Have we been able," I began, "to believe with all our heart in the god for whose worship we have been born all these millions of years, until he actually made himself visible to us?

"How often have I told you," I continued, "that had I not seen you I never would have known all my country as One. I know not yet whether you rightly understand me. The gods are invisible only in their heaven on earth they show themselves to mortal men."

Bimala looked at me in a strange kind of way as she gravely replied: "Indeed I understand you, Sandip." This was the first time she called me plain Sandip.

"Krishna," I continued, "whom Arjuna ordinarily knew only as the driver of his chariot, had also His universal aspect, of which, too, Arjuna had a vision one day, and that day he saw the Truth. I have seen your Universal Aspect in my country. The Ganges and the Brahmaputra are the chains of gold that wind round and round your neck; in the woodland fringes on the distant banks of the dark waters of the river, I have seen your collyrium−darkened eyelashes; the changeful sheen of your *sari* moves for me in the play of light and shade amongst the swaying shoots of green corn; and the blazing summer heat, which makes the whole sky lie gasping like a red−tongued lion in the desert, is nothing but your cruel radiance.

"Since the goddess has vouchsafed her presence to her votary in such wonderful guise, it is for me to proclaim her worship throughout our land, and then shall the country gain new life. 'Your image make we in temple after temple.' [20] But this our people have not yet fully realized. So I would call on them in your name and offer for their worship an image from which none shall be able to withhold belief. Oh give me this boon, this power."

Bimala's eyelids drooped and she became rigid in her seat like a figure of stone. Had I continued she would have gone off into a trance. When I ceased speaking she opened wide her eyes, and murmured with fixed gaze, as though still dazed: "O Traveller in the path of Destruction! Who is there that can stay your progress? Do I not see that none shall stand in the way of your desires? Kings shall lay their crowns at your feet; the wealthy shall hasten to throw open their treasure for your acceptance; those who have nothing else shall beg to be allowed to offer their lives. O my king, my god! What you have seen in me I know not, but I have seen the immensity of your grandeur in my heart. Who am I, what am I, in its presence? Ah, the awful power of Devastation! Never shall I truly live till it kills me utterly! I can bear it no longer, my heart is breaking!"

Bimala slid down from her seat and fell at my feet, which she clasped, and then she sobbed and sobbed and sobbed.

This is hypnotism indeed the charm which can subdue the world! No materials, no weapons but just the delusion of irresistible suggestion. Who says "Truth shall Triumph"?" [21] Delusion shall win in the end. The Bengali understood this when he conceived the image of the ten−handed goddess astride her lion, and spread her worship in the land. Bengal must now create a new image to enchant and conquer the world. *Bande Mataram* !

I gently lifted Bimala back into her chair, and lest reaction should set in, I began again without losing time: "Queen! The Divine Mother has laid on me the duty of establishing her worship in the land. But, alas, 1 am poor!"

Bimala was still flushed, her eyes clouded, her accents thick, as she replied: "You poor? Is not all that each one has yours? What are my caskets full of jewellery for? Drag away from me all my gold and gems for your worship. I have no use for them!"

Once before Bimala had offered up her ornaments. I am not usually in the habit of drawing lines, but I felt I had to draw the line there. [22] I know why I feel this hesitation. It is for man to give ornaments to woman; to take them from her wounds his manliness.

But I must forget myself. Am I taking them? They are for the Divine Mother, to be poured in worship at her feet. Oh, but it must be a grand ceremony of worship such as the country has never beheld before. It must be a landmark in our history. It shall be my supreme legacy to the Nation. Ignorant men worship gods. I, Sandip, shall create them.

But all this is a far cry. What about the urgent immediate? At least three thousand is indispensably necessary five thousand would do roundly and nicely. But how on earth am I to mention money after the high flight we have just taken? And yet time is precious!

I crushed all hesitation under foot as I jumped up and made my plunge: "Queen! Our purse is empty, our work about to stop!"

Bimala winced. I could see she was thinking of that impossible fifty thousand rupees. What a load she must have been carrying within her bosom, struggling under it, perhaps, through sleepless nights! What else had she with which to express her loving worship? Debarred from offering her heart at my feet, she hankers to make this sum of money, so hopelessly large for her, the bearer of her imprisoned feelings. The thought of what she must have gone through gives me a twinge of pain; for she is now wholly mine. The wrench of plucking up the plant by the roots is over. It is now only careful tending and nurture that is needed.

"Queen!" said I, "that fifty thousand rupees is not particularly wanted just now. I calculate that, for the present, five thousand or even three will serve."

The relief made her heart rebound. "I shall fetch you five thousand," she said in tones which seemed like an outburst of song the song which Radhika of the Vaishnava lyrics sang:

> For my lover will I bind in my hair
> The flower which has no equal in the three worlds!

it is the same tune, the same song: five thousand will I bring! That flower will I bind in my hair!

The narrow restraint of the flute brings out this quality of song. I must not allow the pressure of too much greed to flatten out the reed, for then, as I fear, music will give place to the questions "Why?" "What is the use of so much?" "How am I to get it?" not a word of which will rhyme with what Radhika sang! So, as I was saying, illusion alone is real it is the flute itself; while truth is but its empty hollow. Nikhil has of late got a taste of that pure emptiness one can see it in his face, which pains even me. But it was Nikhil's boast that he wanted the Truth, while mine was that I would never let go illusion from my grasp. Each has been suited to his taste, so why complain?

To keep Bimala's heart in the rarefied air of idealism, I cut short all further discussion over the five thousand rupees. I reverted to the demon−destroying goddess and her worship. When was the ceremony to be held and where? There is a great annual fair at Ruimari, within Nikhil's estates, where hundreds of thousands of pilgrims assemble. That would be a grand place to inaugurate the worship of our goddess!

Bimala waxed intensely enthusiastic. This was not the burning of foreign cloth or the people's granaries, so even Nikhil could have no objection so thought she. But I smiled inwardly. How little these two persons, who have been together, day and night, for nine whole years, know of each other! They know something perhaps of their home life, but when it comes to outside concerns they are entirely at sea. They had cherished the belief that the harmony of the home with the outside was perfect. Today they realize to their cost that it is too late to repair their neglect of years, and seek to harmonize them now.

What does it matter? Let those who have made the mistake learn their error by knocking against the world. Why need I bother about their plight? For the present I find it wearisome to keep Bimala soaring much longer, like a captive balloon, in regions ethereal. I had better get quite through with the matter in hand.

When Bimala rose to depart and had neared the door I remarked in my most casual manner: "So, about the money . . ."

Bimala halted and faced back as she said: "On the expiry of the month, when our personal allowances become due . . ."

"That, I am afraid, would be much too late."

"When do you want it then?"

"Tomorrow.

"Tomorrow you shall have it."

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20. A line from Bankim Chatterjee's national song *Bande Mataram*.

21. A quotation from the Upanishads.

22. There is a world of sentiment attached to the ornaments worn by women in Bengal.

They are not merely indicative of the love and regard of the giver, but the wearing of them symbolizes all that is held best in wifehood the constant solicitude for her husband's welfare, the successful performance of the material and spiritual duties of the household entrusted to her care. When the husband dies, and the responsibility for the household changes hands, then are all ornaments cast aside as a sign of the widow's renunciation of worldly concerns. At any other time the giving up of omaments is always a sign of supreme distress and as such appeals acutely to the sense of chivalry of any Bengali who may happen to witness it [Trans.].

Chapter Eight

Nikhil's Story

X

PARAGRAPHS and letters against me have begun to come out in the local papers; cartoons and lampoons are to follow, I am told. Jets of wit and humour are being splashed about, and the lies thus scattered are convulsing the whole country. They know that the monopoly of mud−throwing is theirs, and the innocent passer−by cannot escape unsoiled.

They are saying that the residents in my estates, from the highest to the lowest, are in favour of *Swadeshi*, but they dare not declare themselves, for fear of me. The few who have been brave enough to defy me have felt the full rigour of my persecution. I am in secret league with the police, and in private communication with the magistrate, and these frantic efforts of mine to add a foreign title of my own earning to the one I have inherited, will not, it is opined, go in vain.

On the other hand, the papers are full of praise for those devoted sons of the motherland, the Kundu and the Chakravarti *zamindar*s. If only, say they, the country had a few more of such staunch patriots, the mills of Manchester would have, had to sound their own dirge to the tune of *Bande Mataram*.

Then comes a letter in blood−red ink, giving a list of the traitorous *zamindar*s whose treasuries have been burnt down because of their failing to support the Cause. Holy Fire, it goes on to say, has been aroused to its

sacred function of purifying the country; and other agencies are also at work to see that those who are not true sons of the motherland do cease to encumber her lap. The signature is an obvious *nom−de−plume.*

I could see that this was the doing of our local students. So I sent for some of them and showed them the letter.

The B.A. student gravely informed me that they also had heard that a band of desperate patriots had been formed who would stick at nothing in order to clear away all obstacles to the success of *Swadeshi*.

"If," said I, "even one of our countrymen succumbs to these overbearing desperadoes, that will indeed be a defeat for the country!"

"We fail to follow you, Maharaja," said the history student. "'Our country," I tried to explain, "has been brought to death's door through sheer fear from fear of the gods down to fear of the police; and if you set up, in the name of freedom, the fear of some other bogey, whatever it may be called; if you would raise your victorious standard on the cowardice of the country by means of downright oppression, then no true lover of the country can bow to your decision."

"Is there any country, sir," pursued the history student, "where submission to Government is not due to fear?"

"The freedom that exists in any country," I replied, "may be measured by the extent of this reign of fear. Where its threat is confined to those who would hurt or plunder, there the Government may claim to have freed man from the violence of man. But if fear is to regulate how people are to dress, where they shall trade, or what they must eat, then is man's freedom of will utterly ignored, and manhood destroyed at the root."

"Is not such coercion of the individual will seen in other countries too?" continued the history student.

"Who denies it?" I exclaimed. "But in every country man has destroyed himself to the extent that he has permitted slavery to flourish."

"Does it not rather show," interposed a Master of Arts, "that trading in slavery is inherent in man a fundamental fact of his nature?"

"Sandip Babu made the whole thing clear," said a graduate. "He gave us the example of Harish Kundu, your neighbouring *zamindar*. From his estates you cannot ferret out a single ounce of foreign salt. Why? Because he has always ruled with an iron hand. In the case of those who are slaves by nature, the lack of a strong master is the greatest of all calamities."

"Why, sir!" chimed in an undergraduate, "have you not heard of the obstreperous tenant of Chakravarti, the other *zamindar* close by how the law was set on him till he was reduced to utter destitution? When at last he was left with nothing to eat, he started out to sell his wife's silver ornaments, but no one dared buy them. Then Chakravarti's manager offered him five rupees for the lot. They were worth over thirty, but he had to accept or starve. After taking over the bundle from him the manager coolly said that those five rupees would be credited towards his rent! We felt like having nothing more to do with Chakravarti or his manager after that, but Sandip Babu told us that if we threw over all the live people, we should have only dead bodies from the burning−grounds to carry on the work with! These live men, he pointed out, know what they want and how to get it they are born rulers. Those who do not know how to desire for themselves, must live in accordance with, or die by virtue of, the desires of such as these. Sandip Babu contrasted them Kundu and Chakravarti with you, Maharaja. You, he said, for all your good intentions, will never succeed in planting *Swadeshi* within your territory."

"It is my desire," I said, "to plant something greater than *Swadeshi*. I am not after dead logs but living trees and these will take time to grow."

"I am afraid, sir," sneered the history student, "that you will get neither log nor tree. Sandip Babu rightly teaches that in order to get, you must snatch. This is taking all of us some time to learn, because it runs counter to what we were taught at school. I have seen with my own eyes that when a rent−collector of Harish Kundu's found one of the tenants with nothing which could be sold up to pay his rent, he was made to sell his young wife! Buyers were not wanting, and the *zamindar*'s demand was satisfied. I tell you, sir, the sight of that man's distress prevented my getting sleep for nights together! But, feel it as I did, this much I realized, that the man who knows how to get the money he is out for, even by selling up his debtor's wife, is a better man than I am. I confess it is beyond me I am a weakling, my eyes fill with tears. If anybody can save our country it is these Kundus and these Chakravartis and their officials!"

I was shocked beyond words. "If what you say be true," I cried, "I clearly see that it must be the one endeavour of my life to save the country from these same Kundus and Chakravartis and officials. The slavery that has entered into our very bones is breaking out, at this opportunity, as ghastly tyranny. You have been so used to submit to domination through fear, you have come to believe that to make others submit is a kind of religion. My fight shall be against this weakness, this atrocious cruelty!" These things, which are so simple to ordinary folk, get so twisted in the minds of our B.A.'s and M.A.'s, the only purpose of whose historical quibbles seems to be to torture the truth!

XI

I am worried over Panchu's sham aunt. It will be difficult to disprove her, for though witnesses of a real event may be few or even wanting, innumerable proofs of a thing that has not happened can always be marshalled. The object of this move is, evidently, to get the sale of Panchu's holding to me set aside. Being unable to find any other way out of it, I was thinking of allowing Panchu to hold a permanent tenure in my estates and building him a cottage on it. But my master would not have it. I should not give in to these nefarious tactics so easily, he objected, and offered to attend to the matter himself.

"You, sir!" I cried, considerably surprised.

"Yes, I," he repeated.

I could not see, at all clearly, what my master could do to counteract these legal machinations. That evening, at the time he usually came to me, he did not turn up. On my making inquiries, his servant said he had left home with a few things packed in a small trunk, and some bedding, saying he would be back in a few days. I thought he might have sallied forth to hunt for witnesses in Panchu's uncle's village. In that case, however, I was. sure that his would be a hopeless quest . . .

During the day I forget myself in my work. As the late autumn afternoon wears on, the colours of the sky become turbid, and so do the feelings of my mind. There are many in this world whose minds dwell in brick−built houses they can afford to ignore the thing called the outside. But my mind lives under the trees in the open, directly receives upon itself the messages borne by the free winds, and responds from the bottom of its heart to all the musical cadences of light and darkness.

While the day is bright and the world in the pursuit of its numberless tasks crowds around, then it seems as if my life wants nothing else. But when the colours of the sky fade away and the blinds are drawn down over the windows of heaven, then my heart tells me that evening falls just for the purpose of shutting out the world, to mark the time when the darkness must be filled with the One. This is the end to which earth, sky, and waters conspire, and I cannot harden myself against accepting its meaning. So when the gloaming

deepens over the world, like the gaze of the dark eyes of the beloved, then my whole being tells me that work alone cannot be the truth of life, that work is not the be−all and the end−all of man, for man is not simply a serf even though the serfdom be of the True and the Good.

Alas, Nikhil, have you for ever parted company with that self of yours who used to be set free under the starlight, to plunge into the infinite depths of the night's darkness after the day's work was done? How terribly alone is he, who misses companionship in the midst of the multitudinousness of life.

The other day, when the afternoon had reached the meeting−point of day and night, I had no work, nor the mind for work, nor was my master there to keep me company. With my empty, drifting heart longing to anchor on to something, I traced my steps towards the inner gardens. I was very fond of chrysanthemums and had rows of them, of all varieties, banked up in pots against one of the garden walls. When they were in flower, it looked like a wave of green breaking into iridescent foam. It was some time since I had been to this part of the grounds, and I was beguiled into a cheerful expectancy at the thought of meeting my chrysanthemums after our long separation.

As I went in, the full moon had just peeped over the wall, her slanting rays leaving its foot in deep shadow. It seemed as if she had come a−tiptoe from behind, and clasped the darkness over the eyes, smiling mischievously. When I came near the bank of chrysanthemums, I saw a figure stretched on the grass in front. My heart gave a sudden thud. The figure also sat up with a start at my footsteps.

What was to be done next? I was wondering whether it would do to beat a precipitate retreat. Bimala, also, was doubtless casting about for some way of escape. But it was as awkward to go as to stay! Before I could make up my mind, Bimala rose, pulled the end of her *sari* over her head, and walked off towards the inner apartments.

This brief pause had been enough to make real to me the cruel load of Bimala's misery. The plaint of my own life vanished from me in a moment. I called out: "Bimala!"

She started and stayed her steps, but did not turn back. I went round and stood before her. Her face was in the shade, the moonlight fell on mine. Her eyes were downcast, her hands clenched.

"Bimala," said I, "why should I seek to keep you fast in this closed cage of mine? Do I not know that thus you cannot but pine and droop?"

She stood still, without raising her eyes or uttering a word.

"I know," I continued, "that if I insist on keeping you shackled my whole life will be reduced to nothing but an iron chain. What pleasure can that be to me?"

She was still silent.

"So," I concluded, "I tell you, truly, Bimala, you are free. Whatever I may or may not have been to you, I refuse to be your fetters." With which I came away towards the outer apartments.

No, no, it was not a generous impulse, nor indifference. I had simply come to understand that never would I be free until I could set free. To try to keep Bimala as a garland round my neck, would have meant keeping a weight hanging over my heart. Have I not been praying with all my strength, that if happiness may not be mine, let it go; if grief needs must be my lot, let it come; but let me not be kept in bondage. To clutch hold of that which is untrue as though it were true, is only to throttle oneself. May I be saved from such self−destruction.

When I entered my room, I found my master waiting there. My agitated feelings were still heaving within me. "Freedom, sir," I began unceremoniously, without greeting or inquiry, "freedom is the biggest thing for man. Nothing can be compared to it nothing at all!"

Surprised at my outburst, my master looked up at me in silence.

"One can understand nothing from books," I went on. "We read in the scriptures that our desires are bonds, fettering us as well as others. But such words, by themselves, are so empty. It is only when we get to the point of letting the bird out of its cage that we can realize how free the bird has set us. Whatever we cage, shackles us with desire whose bonds are stronger than those of iron chains. I tell you, sir, this is just what the world has failed to understand. They all seek to reform something outside themselves. But reform is wanted only in one's own desires, nowhere else, nowhere else!"

"We think," he said, "that we are our own masters when we get in our hands the object of our desire but we are really our own masters only when we are able to cast out our desires from our minds."

"When we put all this into words, sir," I went on, "it sounds like some bald−headed injunction, but when we realize even a little of it we find it to be *amrita* which the gods have drunk and become immortal. We cannot see Beauty till we let go our hold of it. It was Buddha who conquered the world, not Alexander this is untrue when stated in dry prose oh when shall we be able to sing it? When shall all these most intimate truths of the universe overflow the pages of printed books and leap out in a sacred stream like the Ganges from the Gangotrie?"

I was suddenly reminded of my master's absence during the last few days and of my ignorance as to its reason. I felt somewhat foolish as I asked him: "And where have you been all this while, sir?"

"Staying with Panchu," he replied.

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "Have you been there all these days?"

"Yes. I wanted to come to an understanding with the woman who calls herself his aunt. She could hardly be induced to believe that there could be such an odd character among the gentlefolk as the one who sought their hospitality. When she found I really meant to stay on, she began to feel rather ashamed of herself. 'Mother,' said I, 'you are not going to get rid of me, even if you abuse me! And so long as I stay, Panchu stays also. For you see, do you not, that I cannot stand by and see his motherless little ones sent out into the streets?'

"She listened to my talks in this strain for a couple of days without saying yes or no. This morning I found her tying up her bundles. 'We are going back to Brindaban,' she said. 'Let us have our expenses for the journey.' I knew she was not going to Brindaban, and also that the cost of her journey would be substantial. So I have come to you."

"The required cost shall be paid," I said.

"The old woman is not a bad sort," my master went on musingly. "Panchu was not sure of her caste, and would not let her touch the water−jar, or anything at all of his. So they were continually bickering. When she found I had no objection to her touch, she looked after me devotedly. She is a splendid cook!

"But all remnants of Panchu's respect for me vanished! To the last he had thought that I was at least a simple sort of person. But here was I, risking my caste without a qualm to win over the old woman for my purpose. Had I tried to steal a march on her by tutoring a witness for the trial, that would have been a different matter. Tactics must be met by tactics. But stratagem at the expense of orthodoxy is more than he can tolerate!

"Anyhow, I must stay on a few days at Panchu's even after the woman leaves, for Harish Kundu may be up to any kind of devilry. He has been telling his satellites that he was content to have furnished Panchu with an aunt, but I have gone the length of supplying him with a father. He would like to see, now, how many fathers of his can save him!"

"We may or may not be able to save him," I said; "but if we should perish in the attempt to save the country from the thousand−and−one snares of religion, custom and selfishness which these people are busy spreading, we shall at least die happy."

Bimala's Story

XIV

Who could have thought that so much would happen in this one life? I feel as if I have passed through a whole series of births, time has been flying so fast, I did not feel it move at all, till the shock came the other day.

I knew there would be words between us when I made up my mind to ask my husband to banish foreign goods from our market. But it was my firm belief that I had no need to meet argument by argument, for there was magic in the very air about me. Had not so tremendous a man as Sandip fallen helplessly at my feet, like a wave of the mighty sea breaking on the shore? Had I called him? No, it was the summons of that magic spell of mine. And Amulya, poor dear boy, when he first came to me how the current of his life flushed with colour, like the river at dawn! Truly have I realized how a goddess feels when she looks upon the radiant face of her devotee.

With the confidence begotten of these proofs of my power, I was ready to meet my husband like a lightning−charged cloud. But what was it that happened? Never in all these nine years have I seen such a far−away, distraught look in his eyes like the desert sky with no merciful moisture of its own, no colour reflected, even, from what it looked upon. I should have been so relieved if his anger had flashed out! But I could find nothing in him which I could touch. I felt as unreal as a dream a dream which would leave only the blackness of night when it was over.

In the old days I used to be jealous of my sister−in−law for her beauty. Then I used to feel that Providence had given me no power of my own, that my whole strength lay in the love which my husband had bestowed on me. Now that I had drained to the dregs the cup of power and could not do without its intoxication, I suddenly found it dashed to pieces at my feet, leaving me nothing to live for.

How feverishly I had sat to do my hair that day. Oh, shame, shame on me, the utter shame of it! My sister−in−law, when passing by, had exclaimed: "Aha, Chota Rani! Your hair seems ready to jump off. Don't let it carry your head with it."

And then, the other day in the garden, how easy my husband found it to tell me that he set me free! But can freedom empty freedom be given and taken so easily as all that? It is like setting a fish free in the sky for how can I move or live outside the atmosphere of loving care which has always sustained me?

When I came to my room today, I saw only furniture only the bedstead, only the looking−glass, only the clothes−rack not the all−pervading heart which used to be there, over all. Instead of it there was freedom, only freedom, mere emptiness! A dried−up watercourse with all its rocks and pebbles laid bare. No feeling, only furniture!

When I had arrived at a state of utter bewilderment, wondering whether anything true was left in my life, and whereabouts it could be, I happened to meet Sandip again. Then life struck against life, and the sparks flew in the same old way. Here was truth impetuous truth which rushed in and overflowed all bounds, truth which was a thousand times truer than the Bara Rani with her maid, Thako and her silly songs, and all the rest of them who talked and laughed and wandered about . . .

"Fifty thousand!" Sandip had demanded.

"What is fifty thousand?" cried my intoxicated heart. "You shall have it!"

How to get it, where to get it, were minor points not worth troubling over. Look at me. Had I not risen, all in one moment, from my nothingness to a height above everything? So shall all things come at my beck and call. I shall get it, get it, get it there cannot be any doubt.

Thus had I come away from Sandip the other day. Then as I looked about me, where was it the tree of plenty? Oh, why does this outer world insult the heart so?

And yet get it I must; how, I do not care; for sin there cannot be. Sin taints only the weak; I with my *Shakti* am beyond its reach. Only a commoner can be a thief, the king conquers and takes his rightful spoil . . . I must find out where the treasury is; who takes the money in; who guards it.

I spent half the night standing in the outer verandah peering at the row of office buildings. But how to get that fifty thousand rupees out of the clutches of those iron bars? If by some *mantram* I could have made all those guards fall dead in their places, I would not have hesitated so pitiless did I feel!

But while a whole gang of robbers seemed dancing a war−dance within the whirling brain of its Rani, the great house of the Rajas slept in peace. The gong of the watch sounded hour after hour, and the sky overhead placidly looked on.

At last I sent for Amulya.

"Money is wanted for the Cause," I told him. "Can you not get it out of the treasury?"

"Why not?" said he, with his chest thrown out.

Alas! had I not said "Why not?" to Sandip just in the same way? The poor lad's confidence could rouse no hopes in my mind.

"How will you do it?" I asked.

The wild plans he began to unfold would hardly bear repetition outside the pages of a penny dreadful.

"No, Amulya," I said severely, "you must not be childish."

"Very well, then," he said, "let me bribe those watchmen."

"Where is the money to come from?"

"I can loot the bazar," he burst out, without blenching.

"Leave all that alone. I have my ornaments, they will serve.

"But," said Amulya, "it strikes me that the cashier cannot be bribed. Never mind, there is another and simpler way."

"What is that?"

"Why need you hear it? It is quite simple."

"Still, I should like to know."

Amulya fumbled in the pocket of his tunic and pulled out, first a small edition of the *Gita*, which he placed on the table and then a little pistol, which he showed me, but said nothing further.

Horror! It did not take him a moment to make up his mind to kill our good old cashier! [23] To look at his frank, open face one would not have thought him capable of hurting a fly, but how different were the words which came from his mouth. It was clear that the cashier's place in the world meant nothing real to him; it was a mere vacancy, lifeless, feelingless, with only stock phrases from the *Gita Who kills the body kills naught!*

"Whatever do you mean, Amulya?" I exclaimed at length. "Don't you know that the dear old man has got a wife and children and that he is . . ."

"Where are we to find men who have no wives and children?" he interrupted. "Look here, Maharani, the thing we call pity is, at bottom, only pity for ourselves. We cannot bear to wound our own tender instincts, and so we do not strike at all pity indeed! The height of cowardice!"

To hear Sandip's phrases in the mouth of this mere boy staggered me. So delightfully, lovably immature was he of that age when the good may still be believed in as good, of that age when one really lives and grows. The Mother in me awoke.

For myself there was no longer good or bad only death, beautiful alluring death. But to hear this stripling calmly talk of murdering an inoffensive old man as the right thing to do, made me shudder all over. The more clearly I saw that there was no sin in his heart, the more horrible appeared to me the sin of his words. I seemed to see the sin of the parents visited on the innocent child.

The sight of his great big eyes shining with faith and enthusiasm touched me to the quick. He was going, in his fascination, straight to the jaws of the python, from which, once in, there was no return. How was he to be saved? Why does not my country become, for once, a real Mother clasp him to her bosom and cry out: "Oh, my child, my child, what profits it that you should save me, if so it be that I should fail to save you?"

I know, I know, that all Power on earth waxes great under compact with Satan. But the Mother is there, alone though she be, to contemn and stand against this devil's progress. The Mother cares not for mere success, however great she wants to give life, to save life. My very soul, today, stretches out its hands in yearning to save this child.

A while ago I suggested robbery to him. Whatever I may now say against it will be put down to a woman's weakness. They only love our weakness when it drags the world in its toils!

"You need do nothing at all, Amulya, I will see to the money," I told him finally. When he had almost reached the door, I called him back.

"Amulya," said I, "I am your elder sister. Today is not the Brothers' Day [24] according to the calendar, but

all the days in the year are really Brothers' Days. My blessing be with you: may God keep you always."

These unexpected words from my lips took Amulya by surprise. He stood stock−still for a time. Then, coming to himself, he prostrated himself at my feet in acceptance of the relationship and did me reverence. When he rose his eyes were full of tears . . . O little brother mine! I am fast going to my death let me take all your sin away with me. May no taint from me ever tarnish your innocence!

I said to him: "Let your offering of reverence be that pistol!"

"What do you want with it, sister?"

"I will practise death."

"Right, sister. Our women, also, must know how to die, to deal death!" with which Amulya handed me the pistol. The radiance of his youthful countenance seemed to tinge my life with the touch of a new dawn. I put away the pistol within my clothes. May this reverence−offering be the last resource in my extremity . . .

The door to the mother's chamber in my woman's heart once opened, I thought it would always remain open. But this pathway to the supreme good was closed when the mistress took the place of the mother and locked it again. The very next day I saw Sandip; and madness, naked and rampant, danced upon my heart.

What was this? Was this, then, my truer self? Never! I had never before known this shameless, this cruel one within me. The snake−charmer had come, pretending to draw this snake from within the fold of my garment but it was never there, it was his all the time. Some demon has gained possession of me, and what I am doing today is the play of his activity it has nothing to do with me.

This demon, in the guise of a god, had come with his ruddy torch to call me that day, saying: "I am your Country. I am your Sandip. I am more to you than anything else of yours. *Bande Mataram*!" And with folded hands I had responded: "You are my religion. You are my heaven. Whatever else is mine shall be swept away before my love for you. *Bande Mataram*!"

Five thousand is it? Five thousand it shall be! You want it tomorrow? Tomorrow you shall have it! In this desperate orgy, that gift of five thousand shall be as the foam of wine and then for the riotous revel! The immovable world shall sway under our feet, fire shall flash from our eyes, a storm shall roar in our ears, what is or is not in front shall become equally dim. And then with tottering footsteps we shall plunge to our death in a moment all fire will be extinguished, the ashes will be scattered, and nothing will remain behind.

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23. The cashier is the official who is most in touch with the ladies of a *zamindar* 's household, directly taking their requisitions for household stores and doing their shopping for them, and so he becomes more a member of the family than the others. [Trans.].

24. The daughter of the house occupies a place of specially tender affection in a Bengali household (perhaps in Hindu households all over India) because, by dictate of custom, she must be given away in marriage so early. She thus takes corresponding memories with her to her husband's home, where she has to begin as a stranger before she can get into her place. The resulting feeling, of the mistress of her new home for the one she has left, has taken ceremonial form as the Brothers' Day, on which the brothers are invited to the married sisters' houses. Where the sister is the elder, she offers her blessing and receives the brother's reverence, and vice versa. Presents, called the offerings of reverence (or blessing), are exchanged. [Trans.].

Chapter Nine. Bimala's Story

XV

FOR a time I was utterly at a loss to think of any way of getting that money. Then, the other day, in the light of intense excitement, suddenly the whole picture stood out clear before me.

Every year my husband makes a reverence−offering of six thousand rupees to my sister−in−law at the time of the Durga Puja. Every year it is deposited in her account at the bank in Calcutta. This year the offering was made as usual, but it has not yet been sent to the bank, being kept meanwhile in an iron safe, in a corner of the little dressing−room attached to our bedroom.

Every year my husband takes the money to the bank himself. This year he has not yet had an opportunity of going to town. How could I fail to see the hand of Providence in this? The money has been held up because the country wants it who could have the power to take it away from her to the bank? And how can I have the power to refuse to take the money? The goddess revelling in destruction holds out her blood−cup crying: "Give me drink. I am thirsty." I will give her my own heart's blood with that five thousand rupees. Mother, the loser of that money will scarcely feel the loss, but me you will utterly ruin!

Many a time, in the old days, have I inwardly called the Senior Rani a thief, for I charged her with wheedling money out of my trusting husband. After her husband's death, she often used to make away with things belonging to the estate for her own use. This I used to point out to my husband, but he remained silent. I would get angry and say: "If you feel generous, make gifts by all means, but why allow yourself to be robbed?" Providence must have smiled, then, at these complaints of mine, for tonight I am on the way to rob my husband's safe of my sister−in−law's money. My husband's custom was to let his keys remain in his pockets when he took off his clothes for the night, leaving them in the dressing−room. I picked out the key of the safe and opened it. The slight sound it made seemed to wake the whole world! A sudden chill turned my hands and feet icy cold, and I shivered all over.

There was a drawer inside the safe. On opening this I found the money, not in currency notes, but in gold rolled up in paper. I had no time to count out what I wanted. There were twenty rolls, all of which I took and tied up in a corner of my *sari*.

What a weight it was. The burden of the theft crushed my heart to the dust. Perhaps notes would have made it seem less like thieving, but this was all gold.

After I had stolen into my room like a thief, it felt like my own room no longer. All the most precious rights which I had over it vanished at the touch of my theft. I began to mutter to myself, as though telling *mantrams: Bande Mataram, Bande Mataram* , my Country, my golden Country, all this gold is for you, for none else!

But in the night the mind is weak. I came back into the bedroom where my husband was asleep, closing my eyes as I passed through, and went off to the open terrace beyond, on which I lay prone, clasping to my breast the end of the *sari* tied over the gold. And each one of the rolls gave me a shock of pain.

The silent night stood there with forefinger upraised. I could not think of my house as separate from my country: I had robbed my house, I had robbed my country. For this sin my house had ceased to be mine, my country also was estranged from me. Had I died begging for my country, even unsuccessfully, that would have been worship, acceptable to the gods. But theft is never worship how then can I offer this gold? Ah me! I am doomed to death myself, must I desecrate my country with my impious touch? The way to put the

money back is closed to me. I have not

the strength to return to the room, take again that key, open once more that safe I should swoon on the threshold of my husband's door. The only road left now is the road in front. Neither have I the strength deliberately to sit down and count the coins. Let them remain behind their coverings: I cannot calculate.

There was no mist in the winter sky. The stars were shining brightly. If, thought I to myself, as I lay out there, I had to steal these stars one by one, like golden coins, for my country these stars so carefully stored up in the bosom of the darkness then the sky would be blinded, the night widowed for ever, and my theft would rob the whole world. But was not also this very thing I had done a robbing of the whole world not only of money, but of trust, of righteousness?

I spent the night lying on the terrace. When at last it was morning, and I was sure that my husband had risen and left the room, then only with my shawl pulled over my head, could I retrace my steps towards the bedroom.

My sister−in−law was about, with her brass pot, watering her plants. When she saw me passing in the distance she cried: "Have you heard the news, Chota Rani?"

I stopped in silence, all in a tremor. It seemed to me that the rolls of sovereigns were bulging through the shawl. I feared they would burst and scatter in a ringing shower, exposing to all the servants of the house the thief who had made herself destitute by robbing her own wealth.

"Your band of robbers," she went on, "have sent an anonymous message threatening to loot the treasury."

I remained as silent as a thief.

"I was advising Brother Nikhil to seek your protection," she continued banteringly. "Call off your minions, Robber Queen! We will offer sacrifices to your *Bande Mataram* if you will but save us. What doings there are these days! but for the Lord's sake, spare our house at least from burglary."

I hastened into my room without reply. I had put my foot on quicksand, and could not now withdraw it. Struggling would only send me down deeper.

If only the time would arrive when I could hand over the money to Sandip! I could bear it no longer, its weight was breaking through my very ribs.

It was still early when I got word that Sandip was awaiting me. Today I had no thought of adornment. Wrapped as I was in my shawl, I went off to the outer apartments. As I entered the sitting−room I saw Sandip and Amulya there, together. All my dignity, all my honour, seemed to run tingling through my body from head to foot and vanish into the ground. I should have to lay bare a woman's uttermost shame in sight of this boy! Could they have been discussing my deed in their meeting place? Had any vestige of a veil of decency been left for me?

We women shall never understand men. When they are bent on making a road for some achievement, they think nothing of breaking the heart of the world into pieces to pave it for the progress of their chariot. When they are mad with the intoxication of creating, they rejoice in destroying the creation of the Creator. This heart−breaking shame of mine will not attract even a glance from their eyes. They have no feeling for life itself all their eagerness is for their object. What am I to them but a meadow flower in the path of a torrent in flood?

What good will this extinction of me be to Sandip? Only five thousand rupees? Was not I good for something more than only five thousand rupees? Yes, indeed! Did I not learn that from Sandip himself, and was I not able in the light of this knowledge to despise all else in my world? I was the giver of light, of life, of *Shakti* , of immortality in that belief, in that joy, I had burst all my bounds and come into the open. Had anyone then fulfilled for me that joy, I should have lived in my death. I should have lost nothing in the loss of my all.

Do they want to tell me now that all this was false? The psalm of my praise which was sung so devotedly, did it bring me down from my heaven, not to make heaven of earth, but only to level heaven itself with the dust?

XVI

"The money, Queen?" said Sandip with his keen glance full on my face.

Amulya also fixed his gaze on me. Though not my own mother's child, yet the dear lad is brother to me; for mother is mother all the world over. With his guileless face, his gentle eyes, his innocent youth, he looked at me. And I, a woman of his mother's sex how could I hand him poison, just because he asked for it?

"The money, Queen!" Sandip's insolent demand rang in my ears. For very shame and vexation I felt I wanted to fling that gold at Sandip's head. I could hardly undo the knot of my *sari*, my fingers trembled so. At last the paper rolls dropped on the table.

Sandip's face grew black . . . He must have thought that the rolls were of silver . . . What contempt was in his looks. What utter disgust at incapacity. It was almost as if he could have struck me! He must have suspected that I had come to parley with him, to offer to compound his claim for five thousand rupees with a few hundreds. There was a moment when I thought he would snatch up the rolls and throw them out of the window, declaring that he was no beggar, but a king claiming tribute.

"Is that all?" asked Amulya with such pity welling up in his voice that I wanted to sob out aloud. I kept my heart tightly pressed down, and merely nodded my head. Sandip was speechless. He neither touched the rolls, nor uttered a sound.

My humiliation went straight to the boy's heart. With a sudden, feigned enthusiasm he exclaimed: "It's plenty. It will do splendidly. You have saved us." With which he tore open the covering of one of the rolls.

The sovereigns shone out. And in a moment the black covering seemed to be lifted from Sandip's countenance also. His delight beamed forth from his features. Unable to control his sudden revulsion of feeling, he sprang up from his seat towards me. What he intended I know not. I flashed a lightning glance towards Amulya the colour had left the boy's face as at the stroke of a whip. Then with all my strength I thrust Sandip from me. As he reeled back his head struck the edge of the marble table and he dropped on the floor. There he lay awhile, motionless. Exhausted with my effort, I sank back on my seat.

Amulya's face lightened with a joyful radiance. He did not even turn towards Sandip, but came straight up, took the dust of my feet, and then remained there, sitting on the floor in front of me. O my little brother, my child! This reverence of yours is the last touch of heaven left in my empty world! I could contain myself no longer, and my tears flowed fast. I covered my eyes with the end of my *sari*, which I pressed to my face with both my hands, and sobbed and sobbed. And every time that I felt on my feet his tender touch trying to comfort me my tears broke out afresh.

After a little, when I had recovered myself and taken my hands from my face, I saw Sandip back at the table, gathering up the sovereigns in his handkerchief, as if nothing had happened. Amulya rose to his seat, from his place near my feet, his wet eyes shining.

Sandip coolly looked up at my face as he remarked: "It is six thousand."

"What do we want with so much, Sandip Babu?" cried Amulya. "Three thousand five hundred is all we need for our work."

"Our wants are not for this one place only," Sandip replied. "We shall want all we can get."

"That may be," said Amulya. "But in future I undertake to get you all you want. Out of this, Sandip Babu, please return the extra two thousand five hundred to the Maharani."

Sandip glanced enquiringly at me.

"No, no," I exclaimed. "I shall never touch that money again. Do with it as you will."

"Can man ever give as woman can?" said Sandip, looking towards Amulya.

"They are goddesses!" agreed Amulya with enthusiasm.

"We men can at best give of our power," continued Sandip. "But women give themselves. Out of their own life they give birth, out of their own life they give sustenance. Such gifts are the only true gifts." Then turning to me, "Queen!" said he, "if what you have given us had been only money I would not have touched it. But you have given that which is more to you than life itself!"

There must be two different persons inside men. One of these in me can understand that Sandip is trying to delude me; the other is content to be deluded. Sandip has power, but no strength of righteousness. The weapon of his which rouses up life smites it again to death. He has the unfailing quiver of the gods, but the shafts in them are of the demons.

Sandip's handkerchief was not large enough to hold all the coins. "Queen," he asked, "can you give me another?" When I gave him mine, he reverently touched his forehead with it, and then suddenly kneeling on the floor he made me an obeisance. "Goddess!" he said, "it was to offer my reverence that I had approached you, but you repulsed me, and roIled me in the dust. Be it so, I accept your repulse as your boon to me, I raise it to my head in salutation!" with which he pointed to the place where he had been hurt.

Had I then misunderstood him? Could it be that his outstretched hands had really been directed towards my feet? Yet, surely, even Amulya had seen the passion that flamed out of his eyes, his face. But Sandip is such an adept in setting music to his chant of praise that I cannot argue; I lose my power of seeing truth; my sight is clouded over like an opium−eater's eyes. And so, after all, he gave me back twice as much in return for the blow I had dealt him the wound on his head ended by making me bleed at heart. When I had received Sandip's obeisance my theft seemed to gain a dignity, and the gold glittering on the table to smile away all fear of disgrace, all stings of conscience.

Like me Amulya also was won back. His devotion to Sandip, which had suffered a momentary check, blazed up anew. The flower−vase of his mind filled once more with offerings for the worship of Sandip and me. His simple faith shone out of his eyes with the pure light of the morning star at dawn.

After I had offered worship and received worship my sin became radiant. And as Amulya looked on my face he raised his folded hands in salutation and cried *Bande Mataram*! I cannot expect to have this adoration surrounding me for ever; and yet this has come to be the only means of keeping alive my self−respect.

I can no longer enter my bedroom. The bedstead seems to thrust out a forbidding hand, the iron safe frowns at

me. I want to get away from this continual insult to myself which is rankling within me. I want to keep running to Sandip to hear him sing my praises. There is just this one little altar of worship which has kept its head above the all−pervading depths of my dishonour, and so I want to cleave to it night and day; for on whichever side I step away from it, there is only emptiness.

Praise, praise, I want unceasing praise. I cannot live if my wine−cup be left empty for a single moment. So, as the very price of my life, I want Sandip of all the world, today.

XVII

When my husband nowadays comes in for his meals I feel I cannot sit before him; and yet it is such a shame not to be near him that I feel I cannot do that either. So I seat myself where we cannot look at each other's face. That was how I was sitting the other day when the Bara Rani came and joined us.

"It is all very well for you, brother," said she, "to laugh away these threatening letters. But they do frighten me so. Have you sent off that money you gave me to the Calcutta bank?"

"No, I have not yet had the time to get it away," my husband replied.

"You are so careless, brother dear, you had better look out. . ."

"But it is in the iron safe right inside the inner dressing−room," said my husband with a reassuring smile.

"What if they get in there? You can never tell!"

"If they go so far, they might as well carry you off too!"

"Don't you fear, no one will come for poor me. The real attraction is in your room! But joking apart, don't run the risk of keeping money in the room like that."

"They will be taking along the Government revenue to Calcutta in a few days now; I will send this money to the bank under the same escort."

"Very well. But see you don't forget all about it, you are so absent−minded."

"Even if that money gets lost, while in my room, the loss cannot be yours, Sister Rani."

"Now, now, brother, you will make me very angry if you talk in that way. Was I making any difference between yours and mine? What if your money is lost, does not that hurt me? If Providence has thought fit to take away my all, it has not left me insensible to the value of the most devoted brother known since the days of Lakshman." [25]

"Well, Junior Rani, are you turned into a wooden doll? You have not spoken a word yet. Do you know, brother, our Junior Rani thinks I try to flatter you. If things came to that pass I should not hesitate to do so, but I know my dear old brother does not need it!"

Thus the Senior Rani chattered on, not forgetting now and then to draw her brother's attention to this or that special delicacy amongst the dishes that were being served. My head was all the time in a whirl. The crisis was fast coming. Something must be done about replacing that money. And as I kept asking myself what could be done, and how it was to be done, the unceasing patter of my sister−in−law's words seemed more and more intolerable.

What made it all the worse was, that nothing could escape my sister−in−law's keen eyes. Every now and then she was casting side glances towards me. What she could read in my face I do not know, but to me it seemed that everything was written there only too plainly.

Then I did an infinitely rash thing. Affecting an easy, amused laugh I said: "All the Senior Rani's suspicions, I see, are reserved for me her fears of thieves and robbers are only a feint."

The Senior Rani smiled mischievously. "You are right, sister mine. A woman's theft is the most fatal of all thefts. But how can you elude my watchfulness? Am I a man, that you should hoodwink me?"

"If you fear me so," I retorted, "let me keep in your hands all I have, as security. If I cause you loss, you can then repay yourself."

"Just listen to her, our simple little Junior Rani!" she laughed back, turning to my husband. "Does she not know that there are losses which no security can make good, either in this world or in the next?"

My husband did not join in our exchange of words. When he had finished, he went off to the outer apartments, for nowadays he does not take his mid−day rest in our room.

All my more valuable jewels were in deposit in the treasury in charge of the cashier. Still what I kept with me must have been worth thirty or forty thousand. I took my jewel−box to the Bara Rani's room and opened it out before her, saying: "I leave these with you, sister. They will keep you quite safe from all worry."

The Bara Rani made a gesture of mock despair. "You positively astound me, Chota Rani!" she said. "Do you really suppose I spend sleepless nights for fear of being robbed by you?"

"What harm if you did have a wholesome fear of me? Does anybody know anybody else in this world?"

"You want to teach me a lesson by trusting me? No, no! I am bothered enough to know what to do with my own jewels, without keeping watch over yours. Take them away, there's a dear, so many prying servants are about."

I went straight from my sister−in−law's room to the sitting−room outside, and sent for Amulya. With him Sandip came along too. I was in a great hurry, and said to Sandip: "If you don't mind, I want to have a word or two with Amulya. Would you. . ."

Sandip smiled a wry smile. "So Amulya and I are separate in your eyes? If you have set about to wean him from me, I must confess I have no power to retain him."

I made no reply, but stood waiting.

"Be it so," Sandip went on. "Finish your special talk with Amulya. But then you must give me a special talk all to myself too, or it will mean a defeat for me. I can stand everything, but not defeat. My share must always be the lion's share. This has been my constant quarrel with Providence. I will defeat the Dispenser of my fate, but not take defeat at his hands." With a crushing look at Amulya, Sandip walked out of the room.

"Amulya, my own little brother, you must do one thing for me," I said.

"I will stake my life for whatever duty you may lay on me, sister."

I brought out my jewel−box from the folds of my shawl and placed it before him. "Sell or pawn these," I said,

"and get me six thousand rupees as fast as ever you can."

"No, no, Sister Rani," said Amulya, touched to the quick. "Let these jewels be. I will get you six thousand all the same."

"Oh, don't be silly," I said impatiently. "There is no time for any nonsense. Take this box. Get away to Calcutta by the night train. And bring me the money by the day after tomorrow positively."

Amulya took a diamond necklace out of the box, held it up to the light and put it back gloomily.

"I know," I told him, "that you will never get the proper price for these diamonds, so I am giving you jewels worth about thirty thousand. I don't care if they all go, but I must have that six thousand without fail."

"Do you know, Sister Rani," said Amulya, "I have had a quarrel with Sandip Babu over that six thousand rupees he took from you? I cannot tell you how ashamed I felt. But Sandip Babu would have it that we must give up even our shame for the country. That may be so. But this is somehow different. I do not fear to die for the country, to kill for the country that much *Shakti* has been given me. But I cannot forget the shame of having taken money from you. There Sandip Babu is ahead of me. He has no regrets or compunctions. He says we must get rid of the idea that the money belongs to the one in whose box it happens to be if we cannot, where is the magic of *Bande Mataram* ?"

Amulya gathered enthusiasm as he talked on. He always warms up when he has me for a listener. "The Gita tells us," he continued, "that no one can kill the soul. Killing is a mere word. So also is the taking away of money. Whose is the money? No one has created it. No one can take it away with him when he departs this life, for it is no part of his soul. Today it is mine, tomorrow my son's, the next day his creditor's. Since, in fact, money belongs to no one, why should any blame attach to our patriots if, instead of leaving it for some worthless son, they take it for their own use?"

When I hear Sandip's words uttered by this boy, I tremble all over. Let those who are snake−charmers play with snakes; if harm comes to them, they are prepared for it. But these boys are so innocent, all the world is ready with its blessing to protect them. They play with a snake not knowing its nature, and when we see them smilingly, trustfully, putting their hands within reach of its fangs, then we understand how terribly dangerous the snake is. Sandip is right when he suspects that though I, for myself, may be ready to die at his hands, this boy I shall wean from him and save.

"So the money is wanted for the use of your patriots?" I questioned with a smile.

"Of course it is!" said Amulya proudly. "Are they not our kings? Poverty takes away from their regal power. Do you know, we always insist on Sandip Babu travelling First Class? He never shirks kingly honours he accepts them not for himself, but for the glory of us all. The greatest weapon of those who rule the world, Sandip Babu has told us, is the hypnotism of their display. To take the vow of poverty would be for them not merely a penance it would mean suicide."

At this point Sandip noiselessly entered the room. I threw my shawl over the jewel−case with a rapid movement.

"The special−talk business not yet over?" he asked with a sneer in his tone.

"Yes, we've quite finished," said Amulya apologetically. "It was nothing much."

"No, Amulya," I said, "we have not quite finished."

"So exit Sandip for the second time, I suppose?" said Sandip.

"If you please."

"And as to Sandip's re−entry .

"Not today. I have no time."

"I see!" said Sandip as his eyes flashed. "No time to waste, only for special talks!"

Jealousy! Where the strong man shows weakness, there the weaker sex cannot help beating her drums of victory. So I repeated firmly: "I really have no time."

Sandip went away looking black. Amulya was greatly perturbed. "Sister Rani," he pleaded, "Sandip Babu is annoyed."

"He has neither cause nor right to be annoyed," I said with some vehemence. "Let me caution you about one thing, Amulya. Say nothing to Sandip Babu about the sale of my jewels on your life."

"No, I will not."

"Then you had better not delay any more. You must get away by tonight's train."

Amulya and I left the room together. As we came out on the verandah Sandip was standing there. I could see he was waiting to waylay Amulya. To prevent that I had to engage him. "What is it you wanted to tell me, Sandip Babu?" I asked.

"I have nothing special to say mere small talk. And since you have not the time . . "

"I can give you just a little."

By this time Amulya had left. As we entered the room Sandip asked: "What was that box Amulya carried away?"

The box had not escaped his eyes. I remained firm. "If I could have told you, it would have been made over to him in your presence!"

"So you think Amulya will not tell me?"

"No, he will not."

Sandip could not conceal his anger any longer. You think you will gain the mastery over me?" he blazed out. "That shall never be. Amulya, there, would die a happy death if I deigned to trample him under foot. I will never, so long as I live, allow you to bring him to your feet!"

Oh, the weak! the weak! At last Sandip has realized that he is weak before me! That is why there is this sudden outburst of anger. He has understood that he cannot meet the power that I wield, with mere strength. With a glance I can crumble his strongest fortifications. So he must needs resort to bluster. I simply smiled in contemptuous silence. At last have I come to a level above him. I must never lose this vantage ground; never descend lower again. Amidst all my degradation this bit of dignity must remain to me!

"I know," said Sandip, after a pause, "it was your jewel−case."

"You may guess as you please," said I, "but you will get nothing out of me.

"So you trust Amulya more than you trust me? Do you know that the boy is the shadow of my shadow, the echo of my echo that he is nothing if I am not at his side?"

"Where he is not your echo, he is himself, Amulya. And that is where I trust him more than I can trust your echo!"

"You must not forget that you are under a promise to render up all your ornaments to me for the worship of the Divine Mother. In fact your offering has already been made."

"Whatever ornaments the gods leave to me will be offered up to the gods. But how can I offer those which have been stolen away from me?"

"Look here, it is no use your trying to give me the slip in that fashion. Now is the time for grim work. Let that work be finished, then you can make a display of your woman's wiles to your heart's content and I will help you in your game."

The moment I had stolen my husband's money and paid it to Sandip, the music that was in our relations stopped. Not only did I destroy all my own value by making myself cheap, but Sandip's powers, too, lost scope for their full play. You cannot employ your marksmanship against a thing which is right in your grasp. So Sandip has lost his aspect of the hero; a tone of low quarrelsomeness has come into his words.

Sandip kept his brilliant eyes fixed full on my face till they seemed to blaze with all the thirst of the mid−day sky. Once or twice he fidgeted with his feet, as though to leave his seat, as if to spring right on me. My whole body seemed to swim, my veins throbbed, the hot blood surged up to my ears; I felt that if I remained there, I should never get up at all. With a supreme effort I tore myself off the chair, and hastened towards the door.

From Sandip's dry throat there came a muffled cry: "Whither would you flee, Queen?" The next moment he left his seat with a bound to seize hold of me. At the sound of footsteps outside the door, however, he rapidly retreated and fell back into his chair. I checked my steps near the bookshelf, where I stood staring at the names of the books.

As my husband entered the room, Sandip exclaimed: "I say, Nikhil, don't you keep Browning among your books here? I was just telling Queen Bee of our college club. Do you remember that contest of ours over the translation of those lines from Browning? You don't?

> "She should never have looked at me,
> If she meant I should not love her,
> There are plenty . . . men you call such,
> I suppose . . . she may discover
> All her soul to, if she pleases,
> And yet leave much as she found them:
> But I'm not so, and she knew it
> When she fixed me, glancing round them.

"I managed to get together the words to render it into Bengali, somehow, but the result was hardly likely to be a 'joy forever' to the people of Bengal. I really did think at one time that I was on the verge of becoming a poet, but Providence was kind enough to save me from that disaster. Do you remember old Dakshina? If he

had not become a Salt Inspector, he would have been a poet. I remember his rendering to this day . . .

"No, Queen Bee, it is no use rummaging those bookshelves. Nikhil has ceased to read poetry since his marriage perhaps he has no further need for it. But I suppose 'the fever fit of poesy', as the Sanskrit has it, is about to attack me again."

"I have come to give you a warning, Sandip," said my husband.

"About the fever fit of poesy?"

My husband took no notice of this attempt at humour. "For some time," he continued, "Mahomedan preachers have been about stirring up the local Mussulmans. They are all wild with you, and may attack you any moment."

"Are you come to advise flight?"

"I have come to give you information, not to offer advice."

"Had these estates been mine, such a warning would have been necessary for the preachers, not for me. If, instead of trying to frighten me, you give them a taste of your intimidation, that would be worthier both of you and me. Do you know that your weakness is weakening your neighbouring *zamindar*s also?"

"I did not offer you my advice, Sandip. I wish you, too, would refrain from giving me yours. Besides, it is useless. And there is another thing I want to tell you. You and your followers have been secretly worrying and oppressing my tenantry. I cannot allow that any longer. So I must ask you to leave my territory."

"For fear of the Mussulmans, or is there any other fear you have to threaten me with?"

"There are fears the want of which is cowardice. In the name of those fears, I tell you, Sandip, you must go. In five days I shall be starting for Calcutta. I want you to accompany me. You may of course stay in my house there to that there is no objection."

"All right, I have still five days" time then. Meanwhile, Queen Bee, let me hum to you my song of parting from your honey−hive. Ah! you poet of modern Bengal! Throw open your doors and let me plunder your words. The theft is really yours, for it is my song which you have made your own let the name be yours by all means, but the song is mine." With this Sandip struck up in a deep, husky voice, which threatened to be out of tune, a song in the Bhairavi mode:

> "In the springtime of your kingdom, my Queen,
> Meetings and partings chase each other in their endless hide and seek,
> And flowers blossom in the wake of those that droop and die in the shade.
> In the springtime of your kingdom, my Queen,
> My meeting with you had its own songs,
> But has not also my leave−taking any gift to offer you?
> That gift is my secret hope, which I keep hidden in the shadows of your flower garden,
> That the rains of July may sweetly temper your fiery June."

His boldness was immense boldness which had no veil, but was naked as fire. One finds no time to stop it: it is like trying to resist a thunderbolt: the lightning flashes: it laughs at all resistance.

I left the room. As I was passing along the verandah towards the inner apartments, Amulya suddenly made

his appearance and came and stood before me.

"Fear nothing, Sister Rani," he said. "I am off tonight and shall not return unsuccessful."

"Amulya," said I, looking straight into his earnest, youthful face, "I fear nothing for myself, but may I never cease to fear for you."

Amulya turned to go, but before he was out of sight I called him back and asked: "Have you a mother, Amulya?"

"I have."

"A sister?"

"No, I am the only child of my mother. My father died when I was quite little."

"Then go back to your mother, Amulya."

"But, Sister Rani, I have now both mother and sister."

"Then, Amulya, before you leave tonight, come and have your dinner here."

"There won't be time for that. Let me take some food for the journey, consecrated with your touch."

"What do you specially like, Amulya?"

"If I had been with my mother I should have had lots of Poush cakes. Make some for me with your own hands, Sister Rani!"

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25. Of the *Ramayana.* The story of his devotion to his elder brother Rama and his brother's wife Sita, has become a byword.

Chapter Ten. Nikhil's Story

XII

I LEARNT from my master that Sandip had joined forces with Harish Kundu, and there was to be a grand celebration of the worship of the demon−destroying Goddess. Harish Kundu was extorting the expenses from his tenantry. Pandits Kaviratna and Vidyavagish had been commissioned to compose a hymn with a double meaning.

My master has just had a passage at arms with Sandip over this. "Evolution is at work amongst the gods as well," says Sandip. "The grandson has to remodel the gods created by the grandfather to suit his own taste, or else he is left an atheist. It is my mission to modernize the ancient deities. I am born the saviour of the gods, to emancipate them from the thraldom of the past."

I have seen from our boyhood what a juggler with ideas is Sandip. He has no interest in discovering truth, but to make a quizzical display of it rejoices his heart. Had he been born in the wilds of Africa he would have

spent a glorious time inventing argument after argument to prove that cannibalism is the best means of promoting true communion between man and man. But those who deal in delusion end by deluding themselves, and I fully believe that, each time Sandip creates a new fallacy, he persuades himself that he has found the truth, however contradictory his creations may . be to one another.

However, I shall not give a helping hand to establish a liquor distillery in my country. The young men, who are ready to offer their services for their country's cause, must not fall into this habit of getting intoxicated. The people who want to exact work by drugging methods set more value on the excitement than on the minds they intoxicate.

I had to tell Sandip, in Bimala's presence, that he must go. Perhaps both will impute to me the wrong motive. But I must free myself also from all fear of being misunderstood. Let even Bimala misunderstand me . . .

A number of Mahomedan preachers are being sent over from Dacca. The Mussulmans in my territory had come to have almost as much of an aversion to the killing of cows as the Hindus. But now cases of cow−killing are cropping up here and there. I had the news first from some of my Mussulman tenants with expressions of their disapproval. Here was a situation which I could see would be difficult to meet. At the bottom was a pretence of fanaticism, which would cease to be a pretence if obstructed. That is just where the ingenuity of the move came in!

I sent for some of my principal Hindu tenants and tried to get them to see the matter in its proper light. "We can be staunch in our own convictions," I said, "but we have no control over those of others. For all that many of us are Vaishnavas, those of us who are Shaktas go on with their animal sacrifices just the same. That cannot be helped. We must, in the same way, let the Mussulmans do as they think best. So please refrain from all disturbance."

"Maharaja," they replied, "these outrages have been unknown for so long."

"That was so," I said, "because such was their spontaneous desire. Let us behave in such a way that the same may become true, over again. But a breach of the peace is not the way to bring this about."

"No, Maharaja," they insisted, "those good old days are gone. This will never stop unless you put it down with a strong hand."

"Oppression," I replied, "will not only not prevent cow−killing, it may lead to the killing of men as well."

One of them had had an English education. He had learnt to repeat the phrases of the day. "It is not only a question of orthodoxy," he argued. "Our country is mainly agricultural, and cows are . . ."

"Buffaloes in this country," I interrupted, "likewise give milk and are used for ploughing. And therefore, so long as we dance frantic dances on our temple pavements, smeared with their blood, their severed heads carried on our shoulders, religion will only laugh at us if we quarrel with Mussulmans in her name, and nothing but the quarrel itself will remain true. If the cow alone is to be held sacred from slaughter, and not the buffalo, then that is bigotry, not religion."

"But are you not aware, sir, of what is behind all this?" pursued the English−knowing tenant. "This has only become possible because the Mussulman is assured of safety, even if he breaks the law. Have you not heard of the Pachur case?"

"Why is it possible," I asked, "to use the Mussulmans thus, as tools against us? Is it not because we have fashioned them into such with our own intolerance? That is how Providence punishes us. Our accumulated

sins are being visited on our own heads."

"Oh, well, if that be so, let them be visited on us. But we shall have our revenge. We have undermined what was the greatest strength of the authorities, their devotion to their own laws. Once they were truly kings, dispensing justice; now they themselves will become law−breakers, and so no better than robbers. This may not go down to history, but we shall carry it in our hearts for all time . . ."

The evil reports about me which are spreading from paper to paper are making me notorious. News comes that my effigy has been burnt at the river−side burning−ground of the Chakravartis, with due ceremony and enthusiasm; and other insults are in contemplation. The trouble was that they had come to ask me to take shares in a Cotton Mill they wanted to start. I had to tell them that I did not so much mind the loss of my own money, but I would not be a party to causing a loss to so many poor shareholders.

"Are we to understand, Maharaja," said my visitors, "that the prosperity of the country does not interest you?"

"Industry may lead to the country's prosperity," I explained, "but a mere desire for its prosperity will not make for success in industry. Even when our heads were cool, our industries did not flourish. Why should we suppose that they will do so just because we have become frantic?"

"Why not say plainly that you will not risk your money?"

"I will put in my money when I see that it is industry which prompts you. But, because you have lighted a fire, it does not follow that you have the food to cook over it."

XIII

What is this? Our Chakua sub−treasury looted! A remittance of seven thousand five hundred rupees was due from there to headquarters. The local cashier had changed the cash at the Government Treasury into small currency notes for convenience in carrying, and had kept them ready in bundles. In the middle of the night an armed band had raided the room, and wounded Kasim, the man on guard. The curious part of it was that they had taken only six thousand rupees and left the rest scattered on the floor, though it would have been as easy to carry that away also. Anyhow, the raid of the dacoits was over; now the police raid would begin. Peace was out of the question.

When I went inside, I found the news had travelled before me. "What a terrible thing, brother," exclaimed the Bara Rani. "Whatever shall we do?"

I made light of the matter to reassure her. "We still have something left," I said with a smile. "We shall manage to get along somehow."

"Don't joke about it, brother dear. Why are they all so angry with you? Can't you humour them? Why put everybody out?"

"I cannot let the country go to rack and ruin, even if that would please everybody."

"That was a shocking thing they did at the burning−grounds. It's a horrid shame to treat you so. The Chota Rani has got rid of all her fears by dint of the Englishwoman's teaching, but as for me, I had to send for the priest to avert the omen before I could get any peace of mind. For my sake, dear, do get away to Calcutta. I tremble to think what they may do, if you stay on here."

My sister−in−law's genuine anxiety touched me deeply.

"And, brother," she went on, "did I not warn you, it was not well to keep so much money in your room? They might get wind of it any day. It is not the money but who knows. . ."

To calm her I promised to remove the money to the treasury at once, and then get it away to Calcutta with the first escort going. We went together to my bedroom. The dressing−room door was shut. When I knocked, Bimala called out: "I am dressing."

"I wonder at the Chota Rani," exclaimed my sister−in−law, "dressing so early in the day! One of their *Bande Mataram* meetings, I suppose. Robber Queen!" she called out in jest to Bimala. "Are you counting your spoils inside?"

"I will attend to the money a little later," I said, as I came away to my office room outside.

I found the Police Inspector waiting for me. "Any trace of the dacoits?" I asked.

"I have my suspicions."

"On whom?"

"Kasim, the guard."

"Kasim? But was he not wounded?"

"A mere nothing. A flesh wound on the leg. Probably self−inflicted."

"But I cannot bring myself to believe it. He is such a trusted servant."

"You may have trusted him, but that does not prevent his being a thief. Have I not seen men trusted for twenty years together, suddenly developing. . ."

"Even if it were so, I could not send him to gaol. But why should he have left the rest of the money lying about?"

"To put us off the scent. Whatever you may say, Maharaja, he must be an old hand at the game. He mounts guard during his watch, right enough, but I feel sure he has a finger in all the dacoities going on in the neighbourhood."

With this the Inspector proceeded to recount the various methods by which it was possible to be concerned in a dacoity twenty or thirty miles away, and yet be back in time for duty.

"Have you brought Kasim here?" I asked.

"No," was the reply, "he is in the lock−up. The Magistrate is due for the investigation."

"I want to see him," I said.

When I went to his cell he fell at my feet, weeping. "In God's name," he said, "I swear I did not do this thing."

"I do not doubt you, Kasim," I assured him. "Fear nothing. They can do nothing to you, if you are innocent."

Kasim, however, was unable to give a coherent account of the incident. He was obviously exaggerating. Four

or five hundred men, big guns, numberless swords, figured in his narrative. It must have been either his disturbed state of mind or a desire to account for his easy defeat. He would have it that this was Harish Kundu's doing; he was even sure he had heard the voice of Ekram, the head retainer of the Kundus.

"Look here, Kasim," I had to warn him, "don't you be dragging other people in with your stories. You are not called upon to make out a case against Harish Kundu, or anybody else."

XIV

On returning home I asked my master to come over. He shook his head gravely. "I see no good in this," said he "this setting aside of conscience and putting the country in its place. All the sins of the country will now break out, hideous and unashamed."

"Who do you think could have . . ."

"Don't ask me. But sin is rampant. Send them all away, right away from here."

"I have given them one more day. They will be leaving the day after tomorrow."

"And another thing. Take Bimala away to Calcutta. She is getting too narrow a view of the outside world from here, she cannot see men and things in their true proportions. Let her see the world men and their work give her abroad vision."

"That is exactly what I was thinking."

"Well, don't make any delay about it. I tell you, Nikhil, man's history has to be built by the united effort of all the races in the world, and therefore this selling of conscience for political reasons this making a fetish of one's country, won't do. I know that Europe does not at heart admit this, but there she has not the right to pose as our teacher. Men who die for the truth become immortal: and, if a whole people can die for the truth, it will also achieve immortality in the history of humanity. Here, in this land of India, amid the mocking laughter of Satan piercing the sky, may the feeling for this truth become real! What a terrible epidemic of sin has been brought into our country from foreign lands. . ."

The whole day passed in the turmoil of investigation. I was tired out when I retired for the night. I left over sending my sister−in−law's money to the treasury till next morning.

I woke up from my sleep at dead of night. The room was dark. I thought I heard a moaning somewhere. Somebody must have been crying. Sounds of sobbing came heavy with tears like fitful gusts of wind in the rainy night. It seemed to me that the cry rose from the heart of my room itself. I was alone. For some days Bimala had her bed in another room adjoining mine. I rose up and when I went out I found her in the balcony lying prone upon her face on the bare floor.

This is something that cannot be written in words. He only knows it who sits in the bosom of the world and receives all its pangs in His own heart. The sky is dumb, the stars are mute, the night is still, and in the midst of it all that one sleepless cry!

We give these sufferings names, bad or good, according to the classifications of the books, but this agony which is welling up from a torn heart, pouring into the fathomless dark, has it any name? When in that midnight, standing under the silent stars, I looked upon that figure, my mind was struck with awe, and I said to myself: "Who am Ito judge her?" O life, O death, O God of the infinite existence, I bow my head in silence to the mystery which is in you.

Once I thought I should turn back. But I could not. I sat down on the ground near Bimala and placed my hand on her head. At the first touch her whole body seemed to stiffen, but the next moment the hardness gave way, and the tears burst out. I gently passed my fingers over her forehead. Suddenly her hands groping for my feet grasped them and drew them to herself, pressing them against her breast with such force that I thought her heart would break.

Bimala's Story

XVIII

Amulya is due to return from Calcutta this morning. I told the servants to let me know as soon as he arrived, but could not keep still. At last I went outside to await him in the sitting−room.

When I sent him off to sell the jewels I must have been thinking only of myself. It never even crossed my mind that so young a boy, trying to sell such valuable jewellery, would at once be suspected. So helpless are we women, we needs must place on others the burden of our danger. When we go to our death we drag down those who are about us.

I had said with pride that I would save Amulya as if she who was drowning could save others. But instead of saving him, I have sent him to his doom. My little brother, such a sister have I been to you that Death must have smiled on that Brothers' Day when I gave you my blessing I, who wander distracted with the burden of my own evil−doing.

I feel today that man is at times attacked with evil as with the plague. Some germ finds its way in from somewhere, and then in the space of one night Death stalks in. Why cannot the stricken one be kept far away from the rest of the world? I, at least, have realized how terrible is the contagion like a fiery torch which burns that it may set the world on fire.

It struck nine. I could not get rid of the idea that Amulya was in trouble, that he had fallen into the clutches of the police. There must be great excitement in the Police Office whose are the jewels? where did he get them? And in the end I shall have to furnish the answer, in public, before all the world.

What is that answer to be? Your day has come at last, Bara Rani, you whom I have so long despised. You, in the shape of the public, the world, will have your revenge. O God, save me this time, and I will cast all my pride at my sister−in−law's feet.

I could bear it no longer. I went straight to the Bara Rani. She was in the verandah, spicing her betel leaves, Thako at her side. The sight of Thako made me shrink back for a moment, but I overcame all hesitation, and making a low obeisance I took the dust of my elder sister−in−law's feet.

"Bless my soul, Chota Rani," she exclaimed, "what has come upon you? Why this sudden reverence?"

"It is my birthday, sister," said I. "I have caused you pain. Give me your blessing today that I may never do so again. My mind is so small." I repeated my obeisance and left her hurriedly, but she called me back.

"You never before told me that this was your birthday, Chotie darling! Be sure to come and have lunch with me this afternoon. You positively must."

O God, let it really be my birthday today. Can I not be born over again? Cleanse me, my God, and purify me and give me one more trial!

I went again to the sitting−room to find Sandip there. A feeling of disgust seemed to poison my very blood. The face of his, which I saw in the morning light, had nothing of the magic radiance of genius.

"Will you leave the room," I blurted out.

Sandip smiled. "Since Amulya is not here," he remarked, "I should think my turn had come for a special talk."

My fate was coming back upon me. How was Ito take away the right I myself had given. "I would be alone," I repeated.

"Queen," he said, "the presence of another person does not prevent your being alone. Do not mistake me for one of the crowd. I, Sandip, am always alone, even when surrounded by thousands."

"Please come some other time. This morning I am . . ."

"Waiting for Amulya?"

I turned to leave the room for sheer vexation, when Sandip drew out from the folds of his cloak that jewel−casket of mine and banged it down on the marble table. I was thoroughly startled. "Has not Amulya gone, then?" I exclaimed.

"Gone where?"

"To Calcutta?"

"No," chuckled Sandip.

Ah, then my blessing had come true, in spite of all. He was saved. Let God's punishment fall on me, the thief, if only Amulya be safe.

The change in my countenance roused Sandip's scorn. "So pleased, Queen!" sneered he. "Are these jewels so very precious? How then did you bring yourself to offer them to the Goddess? Your gift was actually made. Would you now take it back?"

Pride dies hard and raises its fangs to the last. It was clear to me I must show Sandip I did not care a rap about these jewels. "If they have excited your greed," I said, "you may have them."

"My greed today embraces the wealth of all Bengal," replied Sandip. "Is there a greater force than greed? It is the steed of the great ones of the earth, as is the elephant, Airauat, the steed of Indra. So then these jewels are mine?"

As Sandip took up and replaced the casket under his cloak, Amulya rushed in. There were dark rings under his eyes, his lips were dry, his hair tumbled: the freshness of his youth seemed to have withered in a single day. Pangs gripped my heart as I looked on him.

"My box!" he cried, as he went straight up to Sandip without a glance at me. "Have you taken that jewel−box from my trunk?"

"Your jewel−box?" mocked Sandip.

"It was my trunk!"

Sandip burst out into a laugh. "Your distinctions between mine and yours are getting rather thin, Amulya," he cried. "You will die a religious preacher yet, I see."

Amulya sank on a chair with his face in his hands. I went up to him and placing my hand on his head asked him: "What is your trouble, Amulya?"

He stood straight up as he replied: "I had set my heart, Sister Rani, on returning your jewels to you with my own hand. Sandip Babu knew this, but he forestalled me."

"What do I care for my jewels?" I said. "Let them go. No harm is done.

"Go? Where?" asked the mystified boy.

"The jewels are mine," said Sandip. "Insignia bestowed on me by my Queen!"

"No, no, no," broke out Amulya wildly. "Never, Sister Rani! I brought them back for you. You shall not give them away to anybody else."

"I accept your gift, my little brother," said I. "But let him, who hankers after them, satisfy his greed."

Amulya glared at Sandip like a beast of prey, as he growled: "Look here, Sandip Babu, you know that even hanging has no terrors for me. If you dare take away that box of jewels . . ."

With an attempt at a sarcastic laugh Sandip said: "You also ought to know by this time, Amulya, that I am not the man to be afraid of you."

"Queen Bee," he went on, turning to me, "I did not come here today to take these jewels, I came to give them to you. You would have done wrong to take my gift at Amulya's hands. In order to prevent it, I had first to make them clearly mine. Now these my jewels are my gift to you. Here they are! Patch up any understanding with this boy you like. I must go. You have been at your special talks all these days together, leaving me out of them. If special happenings now come to pass, don't blame me.

"Amulya," he continued, "I have sent on your trunks and things to your lodgings. Don't you be keeping any belongings of yours in my room any longer." With this parting shot, Sandip flung out of the room.

XIX

"I have had no peace of mind, Amulya," I said to him, "ever since I sent you off to sell my jewels."

"Why, Sister Rani?"

"I was afraid lest you should get into trouble with them, lest they should suspect you for a thief. I would rather go without that six thousand. You must now do another thing for me go home at once, home to your mother."

Amulya produced a small bundle and said: "But, sister, I have got the six thousand."

"Where from?"

"I tried hard to get gold," he went on, without replying to my question, "but could not. So I had to bring it in notes."

"Tell me truly, Amulya, swear by me, where did you get this money?"

"That I will not tell you."

Everything seemed to grow dark before my eyes. "What terrible thing have you done, Amulya?" I cried. "Is it then . . ."

"I know you will say I got this money wrongly. Very well, I admit it. But I have paid the full price for my wrong−doing. So now the money is mine."

I no longer had any desire to learn more about it. My very blood−vessels contracted, making my whole body shrink within itself.

"Take it away, Amulya," I implored. "Put it back where you got it from."

"That would be hard indeed!"

"It is not hard, brother dear. It was an evil moment when you first came to me. Even Sandip has not been able to harm you as I have done."

Sandip's name seemed to stab him.

"Sandip!" he cried. "It was you alone who made me come to know that man for what he is. Do you know, sister, he has not spent a pice out of those sovereigns he took from you? He shut himself into his room, after he left you, and gloated over the gold, pouring it out in a heap on the floor. 'This is not money,' he exclaimed, 'but the petals of the divine lotus of power; crystallized strains of music from the pipes that play in the paradise of wealth! I cannot find it in my heart to change them, for they seem longing to fulfil their destiny of adorning the neck of Beauty. Amulya, my boy, don't you look at these with your fleshly eye, they are Lakshmi's smile, the gracious radiance of Indra's queen. No, no, I can't give them up to that boor of a manager. I am sure, Amulya, he was telling us lies. The police haven't traced the man who sank that boat. It's the manager who wants to make something out of it. We must get those letters back from him.'

"I asked him how we were to do this; he told me to use force or threats. I offered to do so if he would return the gold. That, he said, we could consider later. I will not trouble you, sister, with all I did to frighten the man into giving up those letters and burn them it is a long story. That very night I came to Sandip and said: 'We are now safe. Let me have the sovereigns to return them tomorrow to my sister, the Maharani.' But he cried, 'What infatuation is this of yours? Your precious sister's skirt bids fair to hide the whole country from you. Say *Bande Mataram* and exorcize the evil spirit.'

"You know, Sister Rani, the power of Sandip's magic. The gold remained with him. And I spent the whole dark night on the bathing−steps of the lake muttering *Bande Mataram*.

"Then when you gave me your jewels to sell, I went again to Sandip. I could see he was angry with me. But he tried not to show it. 'If I still have them hoarded up in any box of mine you may take them,' said he, as he flung me his keys. They were nowhere to be seen. 'Tell me where they are,' I said. 'I will do so,' he replied, 'when I find your infatuation has left you. Not now.'

"When I found I could not move him, I had to employ other methods. Then I tried to get the sovereigns from

him in exchange for my currency notes for six thousand rupees. 'You shall have them,' he said, and disappeared into his bedroom, leaving me waiting outside. There he broke open my trunk and came straight to you with your casket through some other passage. He would not let me bring it, and now he dares call it his gift. How can I tell how much he has deprived me of? I shall never forgive him.

"But, oh sister, his power over me has been utterly broken. And it is you who have broken it!"

"Brother dear," said I, "if that is so, then my life is justified. But more remains to be done, Amulya. It is not enough that the spell has been destroyed. Its stains must be washed away. Don't delay any longer, go at once and put back the money where you took it from. Can you not do it, dear?"

"With your blessing everything is possible, Sister Rani."

"Remember, it will not be your expiation alone, but mine also. I am a woman; the outside world is closed to me, else I would have gone myself. My hardest punishment is that I must put on you the burden of my sin."

"Don't say that, sister. The path I was treading was not your path. It attracted me because of its dangers and difficulties. Now that your path calls me, let it be a thousand times more difficult and dangerous, the dust of your feet will help me to win through. Is it then your command that this money be replaced?"

"Not my command, brother mine, but a command from above."

"Of that I know nothing. It is enough for me that this command from above comes from your lips. And, sister, I thought I had an invitation here. I must not lose that. You must give me your *prasad* [26] before I go. Then, if I can possibly manage it, I will finish my duty in the evening."

Tears came to my eyes when I tried to smile as I said: "So be it."

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26. Food consecrated by the touch of a revered person.

Chapter Eleven. Bimala's Story

XX

WITH Amulya's departure my heart sank within me. On what perilous adventure had I sent this only son of his mother? O God, why need my expiation have such pomp and circumstance? Could I not be allowed to suffer alone without inviting all this multitude to share my punishment? Oh, let not this innocent child fall victim to Your wrath.

I called him back "Amulya!"

My voice sounded so feebly, it failed to reach him.

I went up to the door and called again: "Amulya!"

He had gone.

"Who is there?"

"Rani Mother!"

"Go and tell Amulya Babu that I want him."

What exactly happened I could not make out the man, perhaps, was not familiar with Amulya's name but he returned almost at once followed by Sandip.

"The very moment you sent me away," he said as he came in, "I had a presentiment that you would call me back. The attraction of the same moon causes both ebb and flow. I was so sure of being sent for, that I was actually waiting out in the passage. As soon as I caught sight of your man, coming from your room, I said: 'Yes, yes, I am coming, I am coming at once!' before he could utter a word. That up−country lout was surprised, I can tell you! He stared at me, open−mouthed, as if he thought I knew magic.

"All the fights in the world, Queen Bee," Sandip rambled on, "are really fights between hypnotic forces. Spell cast against spell noiseless weapons which reach even invisible targets. At last I have met in you my match. Your quiver is full, I know, you artful warrior Queen! You are the only one in the world who has been able to turn Sandip out and call Sandip back, at your sweet will. Well, your quarry is at your feet. What will you do with him now? Will you give him the coup de grâce, or keep him in your cage? Let me warn you beforehand, Queen, you will find the beast as difficult to kill outright as to keep in bondage. Anyway, why lose time in trying your magic weapons?"

Sandip must have felt the shadow of approaching defeat, and this made him try to gain time by chattering away without waiting for a reply. I believe he knew that I had sent the messenger for Amulya, whose name the man must have mentioned. In spite of that he had deliberately played this trick. He was now trying to avoid giving me any opening to tell him that it was Amulya I wanted, not him. But his stratagem was futile, for I could see his weakness through it. I must not yield up a pin's point of the ground I had gained.

"Sandip Babu," I said, "I wonder how you can go on making these endless speeches, without a stop. Do you get them up by heart, beforehand?"

Sandip's face flushed instantly.

"I have heard," I continued, "that our professional reciters keep a book full of all kinds of ready−made discourses, which can be fitted into any subject. Have you also a book?"

Sandip ground out his reply through his teeth. "God has given you women a plentiful supply of coquetry to start with, and on the top of that you have the milliner and the jeweller to help you; but do not think we men are so helpless . . ."

"You had better go back and look up your book, Sandip Babu. You are getting your words all wrong. That's just the trouble with trying to repeat things by rote."

"You!" shouted Sandip, losing all control over himself. "You to insult me thus! What is there left of you that I do not know to the very bottom? What . . ." He became speechless.

Sandip, the wielder of magic spells, is reduced to utter powerlessness, whenever his spell refuses to work. From a king he fell to the level of a boor. Oh, the joy of witnessing his weakness! The harsher he became in his rudeness, the more did this joy well up within me. His snaky coils, with which he used to snare me, are exhausted I am free. I am saved, saved. Be rude to me, insult me, for that shows you in your truth; but spare me your songs of praise, which were false.

My husband came in at this juncture. Sandip had not the elasticity to recover himself in a moment, as he used to do before. My husband looked at him for a while in surprise. Had this happened some days ago I should have felt ashamed. But today I was pleased whatever my husband might think. I wanted to have it out to the finish with my weakening adversary.

Finding us both silent and constrained, my husband hesitated a little, and then took a chair. "Sandip," he said, "I have been looking for you, and was told you were here."

"I am here," said Sandip with some emphasis. "Queen Bee sent for me early this morning. And I, the humble worker of the hive, left all else to attend her summons."

"I am going to Calcutta tomorrow. You will come with me.

"And why, pray? Do you take me for one of your retinue?"

"Oh, very well, take it that you are going to Calcutta, and that I am your follower."

"I have no business there."

"All the more reason for going. You have too much business here."

"I don't propose to stir."

"Then I propose to shift you."

"Forcibly?"

"Forcibly."

"Very well, then, I will make a move. But the world is not divided between Calcutta and your estates. There are other places on the map."

"From the way you have been going on, one would hardly have thought that there was any other place in the world except my estates."

Sandip stood up. "It does happen at times," he said, "that a man's whole world is reduced to a single spot. I have realized my universe in this sitting−room of yours, that is why I have been a fixture here."

Then he turned to me. "None but you, Queen Bee," he said, "will understand my words perhaps not even you. I salute you. With worship in my heart I leave you. My watchword has changed since you have come across my vision. It is no longer *Bande Mataram* (Hail Mother), but Hail Beloved, Hail Enchantress. The mother protects, the mistress leads to destruction but sweet is that destruction. You have made the anklet sounds of the dance of death tinkle in my heart. You have changed for me, your devotee, the picture I had of this Bengal of ours 'the soft breeze−cooled land of pure water and sweet fruit.' [27] You have no pity, my beloved. You have come to me with your poison cup and I shall drain it, either to die in agony or live triumphing over death.

"Yes," he continued. "The mother's day is past. O love, my love, you have made as naught for me the truth and right and heaven itself. All duties have become as shadows: all rules and restraints have snapped their bonds. O love, my love, I could set fire to all the world outside this land on which you have set your dainty feet, and dance in mad revel over the ashes . . . These are mild men. These are good men. They would do

good to all as if this all were a reality! No, no! There is no reality in the world save this one real love of mine. I do you reverence. My devotion to you has made me cruel; my worship of you has lighted the raging flame of destruction within me. I am not righteous. I have no beliefs, I only believe in her whom, above all else in the world, I have been able to realize."

Wonderful! It was wonderful, indeed. Only a minute ago I had despised this man with all my heart. But what I had thought to be dead ashes now glowed with living fire. The fire in him is true, that is beyond doubt. Oh why has God made man such a mixed creature? Was it only to show his supernatural sleight of hand? Only a few minutes ago I had thought that Sandip, whom I had once taken to be a hero, was only the stage hero of melodrama. But that is not so, not so. Even behind the trappings of the theatre, a true hero may sometimes be lurking.

There is much in Sandip that is coarse, that is sensuous, that is false, much that is overlaid with layer after layer of fleshly covering. Yet yet it is best to confess that there is a great deal in the depths of him which we do not, cannot understand much in ourselves too. A wonderful thing is man. What great mysterious purpose he is working out only the Terrible One [28] knows meanwhile we groan under the brunt of it. Shiva is the Lord of Chaos. He is all Joy. He will destroy our bonds.

I cannot but feel, again and again, that there are two persons in me. One recoils from Sandip in his terrible aspect of Chaos the other feels that very vision to be sweetly alluring. The sinking ship drags down all who are swimming round it. Sandip is just such a force of destruction. His immense attraction gets hold of one before fear can come to the rescue, and then, in the twinkiing of an eye, one is drawn away, irresistibly, from all light, all good, all freedom of the sky, all air that can be breathed from lifelong accumulations, from everyday cares right to the bottom of dissolution.

From some realm of calamity has Sandip come as its messenger; and as he stalks the land, muttering unholy incantations, to him flock all the boys and youths. The mother, seated in the lotus−heart of the Country, is wailing her heart out; for they have broken open her store−room, there to hold their drunken revelry. Her vintage of the draught for the immortals they would pour out on the dust; her time−honoured vessels they would smash to pieces. True, I feel with her; but, at the same time, I cannot help being infected with their excitement.

Truth itself has sent us this temptation to test our trustiness in upholding its commandments. Intoxication masquerades in heavenly garb, and dances before the pilgrims saying: "Fools you are that pursue the fruitless path of renunciation. Its way is long, its time passing slow. So the Wielder of the Thunderbolt has sent me to you. Behold, I the beautiful, the passionate, I will accept you in my embrace you shall find fulfilment."

After a pause Sandip addressed me again: "Goddess, the time has come for me to leave you. It is well. The work of your nearness has been done. By lingering longer it would only become undone again, little by little. All is lost, if in our greed we try to cheapen that which is the greatest thing on earth. That which is eternal within the moment only becomes shallow if spread out in time. We were about to spoil our infinite moment, when it was your uplifted thunderbolt which came to the rescue. You intervened to save the purity of your own worship and in so doing you also saved your worshipper. In my leave−taking today your worship stands out the biggest thing. Goddess, I, also, set you free today. My earthen temple could hold you no longer every moment it was on the point of breaking apart. Today I depart to worship your larger image in a larger temple. I can gain you more truly only at a distance from yourself. Here I had only your favour, there I shall be vouchsafed your boon."

My jewel−casket was lying on the table. I held it up aloft as I said: "I charge you to convey these my jewels to the object of my worship to whom I have dedicated them through you."

My husband remained silent. Sandip left the room.

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27. Quotation from the National song *Bande Mataram*.

28. Rudra, the Terrible, a name of Shiva. [Trans.].

XXI

I had just sat down to make some cakes for Amulya when the Bara Rani came upon the scene. "Oh dear," she exclaimed, "has it come to this that you must make cakes for your own birthday?"

"Is there no one else for whom I could be making them?" I asked.

"But this is not the day when you should think of feasting others. It is for us to feast you. I was just thinking of making something up [29] when I heard the staggering news which completely upset me. A gang of five or six hundred men, they say, has raided one of our treasuries and made off with six thousand rupees. Our house will be looted next, they expect."

I felt greatly relieved. So it was our own money after all. I wanted to send for Amulya at once and tell him that he need only hand over those notes to my husband and leave the explanations to me.

"You are a wonderful creature!" my sister−in−law broke out, at the change in my countenance. "Have you then really no such thing as fear?"

"I cannot believe it," I said. "Why should they loot our house?"

"Not believe it, indeed! Who could have believed that they would attack our treasury, either?"

I made no reply, but bent over my cakes, putting in the cocoa−nut stuffing.

"Well, I'm off," said the Bara Rani after a prolonged stare at me. "I must see Brother Nikhil and get something done about sending off my money to Calcutta, before it's too late."

She was no sooner gone than I left the cakes to take care of themselves and rushed to my dressing−room, shutting myself inside. My husband's tunic with the keys in its pocket was still hanging there so forgetful was he. I took the key of the iron safe off the ring and kept it by me, hidden in the folds of my dress.

Then there came a knocking at the door. "I am dressing," I called out. I could hear the Bara Rani saying: "Only a minute ago I saw her making cakes and now she is busy dressing up. What next, I wonder! One of their *Bande Mataram* meetings is on, I suppose. I say, Robber Queen," she called out to me, "are you taking stock of your loot?"

When they went away I hardly know what made me open the safe. Perhaps there was a lurking hope that it might all be a dream. What if, on pulling out the inside drawer, I should find the rolls of gold there, just as before? . . . Alas, everything was empty as the trust which had been betrayed.

I had to go through the farce of dressing. I had to do my hair up all over again, quite unnecessarily. When I came out my sister−in−law railed at me: "How many times are you going to dress today?"

"My birthday!" I said.

"Oh, any pretext seems good enough," she went on. "Many vain people have I seen in my day, but you beat them all hollow."

I was about to summon a servant to send after Amulya, when one of the men came up with a little note, which he handed to me. It was from Amulya. "Sister," he wrote, you invited me this afternoon, but I thought I should not wait. Let me first execute your bidding and then come for my *prasad*. I may be a little late."

To whom could he be going to return that money? into what fresh entanglement was the poor boy rushing? O miserable woman, you can only send him off like an arrow, but not recall him if you miss your aim.

I should have declared at once that I was at the bottom of this robbery. But women live on the trust of their surroundings this is their whole world. If once it is out that this trust has been secretly betrayed, their place in their world is lost. They have then to stand upon the fragments of the thing they have broken, and its jagged edges keep on wounding them at every turn. To sin is easy enough, but to make up for it is above all difficult for a woman.

For some time past all easy approaches for communion with my husband have been closed to me. How then could I burst on him with this stupendous news? He was very late in coming for his meal today nearly two o'clock. He was absent−minded and hardly touched any food. I had lost even the right to press him to take a little more. I had to avert my face to wipe away my tears.

I wanted so badly to say to him: "Do come into our room and rest awhile; you look so tired." I had just cleared my throat with a little cough, when a servant hurried in to say that the Police Inspector had brought Panchu up to the palace. My husband, with the shadow on his face deepened, left his meal unfinished and went out.

A little later the Bara Rani appeared. "Why did you not send me word when Brother Nikhil came in?" she complained. "As he was late I thought I might as well finish my bath in the meantime. However did he manage to get through his meal so soon?"

"Why, did you want him for anything?"

"What is this about both of you going off to Calcutta tomorrow? All I can say is, I am not going to be left here alone. I should get startled out of my life at every sound, with all these dacoits about. Is it quite settled about your going tomorrow?"

"Yes," said I, though I had only just now heard it; and though, moreover, I was not at all sure that before tomorrow our history might not take such a turn as to make it all one whether we went or stayed. After that, what our home, our life would be like, was utterly beyond my ken it seemed so misty and phantom−like.

In a very few hours now my unseen fate would become visible. Was there no one who could keep on postponing the flight of these hours, from day to day, and so make them long enough for me to set things right, so far as lay in my power? The time during which the seed lies underground is long so long indeed that one forgets that there is any danger of its sprouting. But once its shoot shows up above the surface, it grows and grows so fast, there is no time to cover it up, neither with skirt, nor body, nor even life itself.

I will try to think of it no more, but sit quiet passive and callous let the crash come when it may. By the day after tomorrow all will be over publicity, laughter, bewailing, questions, explanations everything.

But I cannot forget the face of Amulya beautiful, radiant with devotion. He did not wait, despairing, for the blow of fate to fall, but rushed into the thick of danger. In my misery I do him reverence. He is my boy−god. Under the pretext of his playfulness he took from me the weight of my burden. He would save me by taking the punishment meant for me on his own head. But how am Ito bear this terrible mercy of my God?

Oh, my child, my child, I do you reverence. Little brother mine, I do you reverence. Pure are you, beautiful are you, I do you reverence. May you come to my arms, in the next birth, as my own child that is my prayer.

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29. Any dainties to be offered ceremonially should be made by the lady of the house herself. [Trans.].

XXII

Rumour became busy on every side. The police were continually in and out. The servants of the house were in a great flurry.

Khema, my maid, came up to me and said: "Oh, Rani Mother! for goodness" sake put away my gold necklace and armlets in your iron safe." To whom was Ito explain that the Rani herself had been weaving all this network of trouble, and had got caught in it, too? I had to play the benign protector and take charge of Khema's ornaments and Thako's savings. The milk−woman, in her turn, brought along and kept in my room a box in which were a Benares *sari* and some other of her valued possessions. "I got these at your wedding," she told me.

When, tomorrow, my iron safe will be opened in the presence of these Khema, Thako, the milk−woman and all the rest . . . Let me not think of it! Let me rather try to think what it will be like when this third day of Magh comes round again after a year has passed. Will all the wounds of my home life then be still as fresh as ever? . . .

Amulya writes that he will come later in the evening. I cannot remain alone with my thoughts, doing nothing. So I sit down again to make cakes for him. I have finished making quite a quantity, but still I must go on. Who will eat them? I shall distribute them amongst the servants. I must do so this very night. Tonight is my limit. Tomorrow will not be in my hands.

I went on untiringly, frying cake after cake. Every now and then it seemed to me that there was some noise in the direction of my rooms, upstairs. Could it be that my husband had missed the key of the safe, and the Bara Rani had assembled all the servants to help him to hunt for it? No, I must not pay heed to these sounds. Let me shut the door.

I rose to do so, when Thako came panting in: "Rani Mother, oh, Rani Mother!"

"Oh get away!" I snapped out, cutting her short. "Don't come bothering me."

"The Bara Rani Mother wants you," she went on. "Her nephew has brought such a wonderful machine from Calcutta. It talks like a man. Do come and hear it!"

I did not know whether to laugh or to cry. So, of all things, a gramophone needs must come on the scene at such a time, repeating at every winding the nasal twang of its theatrical songs! What a fearsome thing results when a machine apes a man.

The shades of evening began to fall. I knew that Amulya would not delay to announce himself yet I could

not wait. I summoned a servant and said: "Go and tell Amulya Babu to come straight in here." The man came back after a while to say that Amulya was not in he had not come back since he had gone.

"Gone!" The last word struck my ears like a wail in the gathering darkness. Amulya gone! Had he then come like a streak of light from the setting sun, only to be gone for ever? All kinds of possible and impossible dangers flitted through my mind. It was I who had sent him to his death. What if he was fearless? That only showed his own greatness of heart. But after this how was Ito go on living all by myself?

I had no memento of Amulya save that pistol his reverence−offering. It seemed to me that this was a sign given by Providence. This guilt which had contaminated my life at its very root my God in the form of a child had left with me the means of wiping it away, and then vanished. Oh the loving gift the saving grave that lay hidden within it!

I opened my box and took out the pistol, lifting it reverently to my forehead. At that moment the gongs clanged out from the temple attached to our house. I prostrated myself in salutation.

In the evening I feasted the whole household with my cakes. "You have managed a wonderful birthday feast and all by yourself too!" exclaimed my sister−in−law. "But you must leave something for us to do." With this she turned on her gramophone and let loose the shrill treble of the Calcutta actresses all over the place. It seemed like a stable full of neighing fillies.

It got quite late before the feasting was over. I had a sudden longing to end my birthday celebration by taking the dust of my husband's feet. I went up to the bedroom and found him fast asleep. He had had such a worrying, trying day. I raised the edge of the mosquito curtain very very gently, and laid my head near his feet. My hair must have touched him, for he moved his legs in his sleep and pushed my head away.

I then went out and sat in the west verandah. A silk−cotton tree, which had shed all its leaves, stood there in the distance, like a skeleton. Behind it the crescent moon was setting. All of a sudden I had the feeling that the very stars in the sky were afraid of me that the whole of the night world was looking askance at me. Why? Because I was alone.

There is nothing so strange in creation as the man who is alone. Even he whose near ones have all died, one by one, is not alone companionship comes for him from behind the screen of death. But he, whose kin are there, yet no longer near, who has dropped out of all the varied companionship of a full home the starry universe itself seems to bristle to look on him in his darkness.

Where I am, I am not. I am far away from those who are around me. I live and move upon a world−wide chasm of separation, unstable as the dew−drop upon the lotus leaf.

Why do not men change wholly when they change? When I look into my heart, I find everything that was there, still there only they are topsy−turvy. Things that were well−ordered have become jumbled up. The gems that were strung into a necklace are now rolling in the dust. And so my heart is breaking.

I feel I want to die. Yet in my heart everything still lives nor even in death can I see the end of it all: rather, in death there seems to be ever so much more of repining. What is to be ended must be ended in this life there is no other way out.

Oh forgive me just once, only this time, Lord! All that you gave into my hands as the wealth of my life, I have made into my burden. I can neither bear it longer, nor give it up. O Lord, sound once again those flute strains which you played for me, long ago, standing at the rosy edge of my morning sky and let all my complexities become simple and easy. Nothing save the music of your flute can make whole that which has

been broken, and pure that which has been sullied. Create my home anew with your music. No other way can I see.

I threw myself prone on the ground and sobbed aloud. It was for mercy that I prayed some little mercy from somewhere, some shelter, some sign of forgiveness, some hope that might bring about the end. "Lord," I vowed to myself, "I will lie here, waiting and waiting, touching neither food nor drink, so long as your blessing does not reach me."

I heard the sound of footsteps. Who says that the gods do not show themselves to mortal men? I did not raise my face to look up, lest the sight of it should break the spell. Come, oh come, come and let your feet touch my head. Come, Lord, and set your foot upon my throbbing heart, and at that moment let me die.

He came and sat near my head. Who? My husband! At the first touch of his presence I felt that I should swoon. And then the pain at my heart burst its way out in an overwhelming flood of tears, tearing through all my obstructing veins and nerves. I strained his feet to my bosom oh, why could not their impress remain there for ever?

He tenderly stroked my head. I received his blessing. Now I shall be able to take up the penalty of public humiliation which will be mine tomorrow, and offer it, in all sincerity, at the feet of my God.

But what keeps crushing my heart is the thought that the festive flutes which were played at my wedding, nine years ago, welcoming me to this house, will never sound for me again in this life. What rigour of penance is there which can serve to bring me once more, as a bride adorned for her husband, to my place upon that same bridal seat? How many years, how many ages, aeons, must pass before I can find my way back to that day of nine years ago?

God can create new things, but has even He the power to create afresh that which has been destroyed?

Chapter Twelve. Nikhil's Story

XV

TODAY we are going to Calcutta. Our joys and sorrows lie heavy on us if we merely go on accumulating them. Keeping them and accumulating them alike are false. As master of the house I am in an artificial position in reality I am a wayfarer on the path of life. That is why the true Master of the House gets hurt at every step and at last there comes the supreme hurt of death.

My union with you, my love, was only of the wayside; it was well enough so long as we followed the same road; it will only hamper us if we try to preserve it further. We are now leaving its bonds behind. We are started on our journey beyond, and it will be enough if we can throw each other a glance, or feel the touch of each other's hands in passing. After that? After that there is the larger world−path, the endless current of universal life.

How little can you deprive me of, my love, after all? Whenever I set my ear to it, I can hear the flute which is playing, its fountain of melody gushing forth from the flute−stops of separation. The immortal draught of the goddess is never exhausted. She sometimes breaks the bowl from which we drink it, only to smile at seeing us so disconsolate over the trifling loss. I will not stop to pick up my broken bowl. I will march forward, albeit with unsatisfied heart.

The Bara Rani came and asked me: "What is the meaning, brother, of all these books being packed up and

sent off in box−loads?"

"It only means," I replied, "that I have not yet been able to get over my fondness for them."

"I only wish you would keep your fondness for some other things as well! Do you mean you are never coming back home?"

"I shall be coming and going, but shall not immure myself here any more."

"Oh indeed! Then just come along to my room and see how many things *I* have been unable to shake off *my* fondness for." With this she took me by the hand and marched me off.

In my sister−in−law's rooms I found numberless boxes and bundles ready packed. She opened one of the boxes and said: "See, brother, look at all my *pan*−making things. In this bottle I have catechu powder scented with the pollen of screw−pine blossoms. These little tin boxes are all for different kinds of spices. I have not forgotten my playing cards and draught−board either. If you two are over−busy, I shall manage to make other friends there, who will give me a game. Do you remember this comb? It was one of the *Swadeshi* combs you brought for me. . ."

"But what is all this for, Sister Rani? Why have you been packing up all these things?"

"Do you think I am not going with you?"

"What an extraordinary idea!"

"Don't you be afraid! I am not going there to flirt with you, nor to quarrel with the Chota Rani! One must die sooner or later, and it is just as well to be on the bank of the holy Ganges before it is too late. It is too horrible to think of being cremated in your wretched burning−ground here, under that stumpy banian tree that is why I have been refusing to die, and have plagued you all this time."

At last I could hear the true voice of home. The Bara Rani came into our house as its bride, when I was only six years old. We have played together, through the drowsy afternoons, in a corner of the roof−terrace. I have thrown down to her green amras from the tree−top, to be made into deliciously indigestible chutnies by slicing them up with mustard, salt and fragrant herbs. It was my part to gather for her all the forbidden things from the store−room to be used in the marriage celebration of her doll; for, in the penal code of my grandmother, I alone was exempt from punishment. And I used to be appointed her messenger to my brother, whenever she wanted to coax something special out of him, because he could not resist my importunity. I also remember how, when I suffered under the rigorous régime of the doctors of those days who would not allow anything except warm water and sugared cardamom seeds during feverish attacks my sister−in−law could not bear my privation and used to bring me delicacies on the sly. What a scolding she got one day when she was caught!

And then, as we grew up, our mutual joys and sorrows took on deeper tones of intimacy. How we quarrelled! Sometimes conflicts of worldly interests roused suspicions and jealousies, making breaches in our love; and when the Chota Rani came in between us, these breaches seemed as if they would never be mended, but it always turned out that the healing forces at bottom proved more powerful than the wounds on the surface.

So has a true relationship grown up between us, from our childhood up till now, and its branching foliage has spread and broadened over every room and verandah and terrace of this great house. When I saw the Bara Rani make ready, with all her belongings, to depart from this house of ours, all the ties that bound us, to their wide−spreading ends, felt the shock.

The reason was clear to me, why she had made up her mind to drift away towards the unknown, cutting asunder all her lifelong bonds of daily habit, and of the house itself, which she had never left for a day since she first entered it at the age of nine. And yet it was this real reason which she could not allow to escape her lips, preferring rather to put forward any other paltry excuse.

She had only this one relationship left in all the world, and the poor, unfortunate, widowed and childless woman had cherished it with all the tenderness hoarded in her heart. How deeply she had felt our proposed separation I never realized so keenly as when I stood amongst her scattered boxes and bundles.

I could see at once that the little differences she used to have with Bimala, about money matters, did not proceed from any sordid worldliness, but because she felt that her claims in regard to this one relationship of her life had been overridden and its ties weakened for her by the coming in between of this other woman from goodness knows where! She had been hurt at every turn and yet had not the right to complain.

And Bimala? She also had felt that the Senior Rani's claim over me was not based merely on our social connection, but went much deeper; and she was jealous of these ties between us, reaching back to our childhood.

Today my heart knocked heavily against the doors of my breast. I sank down upon one of the boxes as I said: "How I should love, Sister Rani, to go back to the days when we first met in this old house of ours."

"No, brother dear," she replied with a sigh, "I would not live my life again not as a woman! Let what I have had to bear end with this one birth. I could not bear it over again."

I said to her: "The freedom to which we pass through sorrow is greater than the sorrow."

"That may be so for you men. Freedom is for you. But we women would keep others bound. We would rather be put into bondage ourselves. No, no, brother, you will never get free from our toils. If you needs must spread your wings, you will have to take us with you; we refuse to be left behind. That is why I have gathered together all this weight of luggage. It would never do to allow men to run too light."

"I can feel the weight of your words," I said laughing, "and if we men do not complain of your burdens, it is because women pay us so handsomely for what they make us carry."

"You carry it," she said, "because it is made up of many small things. Whichever one you think of rejecting pleads that it is so light. And so with much lightness we weigh you down . . . When do we start?"

"The train leaves at half past eleven tonight. There will be lots of time."

"Look here, do be good for once and listen to just one word of mine. Take a good nap this afternoon. You know you never get any sleep in the train. You look so pulled down, you might go to pieces any moment. Come along, get through your bath first."

As we went towards my room, Khema, the maid, came up and with an ultra−modest pull at her veil told us, in deprecatingly low tones, that the Police Inspector had arrived with a prisoner and wanted to see the Maharaja.

"Is the Maharaja a thief, or a robber," the Bara Rani flared up, "that he should be set upon so by the police? Go and tell the Inspector that the Maharaja is at his bath."

"Let me just go and see what is the matter," I pleaded. "It may be something urgent."

"No, no," my sister−in−law insisted. "Our Chota Rani was making a heap of cakes last night. I'll send some to the Inspector, to keep him quiet till you're ready." With this she pushed me into my room and shut the door on me.

I had not the power to resist such tyranny so rare is it in this world. Let the Inspector while away the time eating cakes. What if business is a bit neglected?

The police had been in great form these last few days arresting now this one, now that. Each day some innocent person or other would be brought along to enliven the assembly in my office−room. One more such unfortunate, I supposed, must have been brought in that day. But why should the Inspector alone be regaled with cakes? That would not do at all. I thumped vigorously on the door.

"If you are going mad, be quick and pour some water over your head that will keep you cool," said my sister−in−law from the passage.

"Send down cakes for two," I shouted. "The person who has been brought in as the thief probably deserves them better. Tell the man to give him a good big helping."

I hurried through my bath. When I came out, I found Bimal sitting on the floor outside. [30] Could this be my Bimal of old, my proud, sensitive Bimal?

What favour could she be wanting to beg, seated like this at my door?

As I stopped short, she stood up and said gently with downcast eyes: "I would have a word with you."

"Come inside then," I said.

"But are you going out on any particular business?"

"I was, but let that be. I want to hear . . ."

"No, finish your business first. We will have our talk after you have had your dinner."

I went off to my sitting−room, to find the Police Inspector's plate quite empty. The person he had brought with him, however, was still busy eating.

"Hullo!" I ejaculated in surprise. "You, Amulya?"

"It is I, sir," said Amulya with his mouth full of cake. "I've had quite a feast. And if you don't mind, I'll take the rest with me." With this he proceeded to tie up the remaining cakes in his handkerchief.

"What does this mean?" I asked, staring at the Inspector.

The man laughed. "We are no nearer, sir," he said, "to solving the problem of the thief: meanwhile the mystery of the theft deepens." He then produced something tied up in a rag, which when untied disclosed a bundle of currency notes. "This, Maharaja," said the Inspector, "is your six thousand rupees!"

"Where was it found?"

"In Amulya Babu's hands. He went last evening to the manager of your Chakna sub−office to tell him that the money had been found. The manager seemed to be in a greater state of trepidation at the recovery than he had

been at the robbery. He was afraid he would be suspected of having made away with the notes and of now making up a cock−and−bull story for fear of being found out. He asked Amulya to wait, on the pretext of getting him some refreshment, and came straight over to the Police Office. I rode off at once, kept Amulya with me, and have been busy with him the whole morning. He refuses to tell us where he got the money from. I warned him he would be kept under restraint till he did so. In that case, he informed me he would have to lie. Very well, I said, he might do so if he pleased. Then he stated that he had found the money under a bush. I pointed out to him that it was not quite so easy to lie as all that. Under what bush? Where was the place? Why was he there? All this would have to be stated as well. 'Don't you worry,' he said, 'there is plenty of time to invent all that.'"

"But, Inspector," I said, "why are you badgering a respectable young gentleman like Amulya Babu?"

"I have no desire to harass him," said the Inspector. "He is not only a gentleman, but the son of Nibaran Babu, my school−fellow. Let me tell you, Maharaja, exactly what must have happened. Amulya knows the thief, but wants to shield him by drawing suspicion on himself. That is just the sort of bravado he loves to indulge in." The Inspector turned to Amulya. "Look here, young man," he continued, "I also was eighteen once upon a time, and a student in the Ripon College. I nearly got into gaol trying to rescue a hack driver from a police constable. It was a near shave." Then he turned again to me and said: "Maharaja, the real thief will now probably escape, but I think I can tell you who is at the bottom of it all."

"Who is it, then?" I asked.

"The manager, in collusion with the guard, Kasim."

When the Inspector, having argued out his theory to his own satisfaction, at last departed, I said to Amulya: "If you will tell me who took the money, I promise you no one shall be hurt."

"I did," said he.

"But how can that be? What about the gang of armed men?. . ."

"It was I, by myself, alone!"

What Amulya then told me was indeed extraordinary. The manager had just finished his supper and was on the verandah rinsing out his mouth. The place was somewhat dark. Amulya had a revolver in each pocket, one loaded with blank cartridges, the other with ball. He had a mask over his face. He flashed a bull's−eye lantern in the manager's face and fired a blank shot. The man swooned away. Some of the guards, who were off duty, came running up, but when Amulya fired another blank shot at them they lost no time in taking cover. Then Kasim, who was on duty, came up whirling a quarterstaff. This time Amulya aimed a bullet at his legs, and finding himself hit, Kasim collapsed on the floor. Amulya then made the trembling manager, who had come to his senses, open the safe and deliver up six thousand rupees. Finally, he took one of the estate horses and galloped off a few miles, there let the animal loose, and quietly walked up here, to our place.

"What made you do all this, Amulya?" I asked.

"There was a grave reason, Maharaja," he replied.

"But why, then, did you try to return the money?"

"Let her come, at whose command I did so. In her presence I shall make a clean breast of it."

"And who may 'she' be?"

"My sister, the Chota Rani!"

I sent for Bimala. She came hesitatingly, barefoot, with a white shawl over her head. I had never seen my Bimal like this before. She seemed to have wrapped herself in a morning light.

Amulya prostrated himself in salutation and took the dust of her feet. Then, as he rose, he said: "Your command has been executed, sister. The money is returned."

"You have saved me, my little brother," said Bimal.

"With your image in my mind, I have not uttered a single lie," Amulya continued. "My watchword *Bande Mataram* has been cast away at your feet for good. I have also received my reward, your *prasad* , as soon as I came to the palace."

Bimal looked at him blankly, unable to follow his last words. Amulya brought out his handkerchief, and untying it showed her the cakes put away inside. "I did not eat them all," he said. "I have kept these to eat after you have helped me with your own hands."

I could see that I was not wanted here. I went out of the room. I could only preach and preach, so I mused, and get my effigy burnt for my pains. I had not yet been able to bring back a single soul from the path of death. They who have the power, can do so by a mere sign. My words have not that ineffable meaning. I am not a flame, only a black coal, which has gone out. I can light no lamp. That is what the story of my life shows my row of lamps has remained unlit.

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30. Sitting on the bare floor is a sign of mourning, and so, by association of ideas, of an abject attitude of mind. [Trans.].

XVI

I returned slowly towards the inner apartments. The Bara Rani's room must have been drawing me again. It had become an absolute necessity for me, that day, to feel that this life of mine had been able to strike some real, some responsive chord in some other harp of life. One cannot realize one's own existence by remaining within oneself it has to be sought outside.

As I passed in front of my sister−in−law's room, she came out saying: "I was afraid you would be late again this afternoon. However. I ordered your dinner as soon as I heard you coming. It will be served in a minute."

"Meanwhile," I said; "let me take out that money of yours and have it kept ready to take with us."

As we walked on towards my room she asked me if the Police Inspector had made any report about the robbery. I somehow did not feel inclined to tell her all the details of how that six thousand had come back. "That's just what all the fuss is about," I said evasively.

When I went into my dressing−room and took out my bunch of keys, I did not find the key of the iron safe on the ring. What an absurdly absent−minded fellow I was, to be sure! Only this morning I had been opening so many boxes and things, and never noticed that this key was not there.

"What has happened to your key?" she asked me.

I went on fumbling in this pocket and that, but could give her no answer. I hunted in the same place over and over again. It dawned on both of us that it could not be a case of the key being mislaid. Someone must have taken it off the ring. Who could it be? Who else could have come into this room?

"Don't you worry about it," she said to me. "Get through your dinner first. The Chota Rani must have kept it herself, seeing how absent−minded you are getting."

I was, however, greatly disturbed. It was never Bimal's habit to take any key of mine without telling me about it. Bimal was not present at my meal−time that day: she was busy feasting Amulya in her own room. My sister−in−law wanted to send for her, but I asked her not to do so.

I had just finished my dinner when Bimal came in. I would have preferred not to discuss the matter of the key in the Bara Rani's presence, but as soon as she saw Bimal, she asked her: "Do you know, dear, where the key of the safe is?"

"I have it," was the reply.

"Didn't I say so!" exclaimed my sister−in−law triumphantly. "Our Chota Rani pretends not to care about these robberies, but she takes precautions on the sly, all the same."

The look on Bimal's face made my mind misgive me. "Let the key be, now," I said. "I will take out that money in the evening."

"There you go again, putting it off," said the Bara Rani. "Why not take it out and send it to the treasury while you have it in mind?"

"I have taken it out already," said Bimal.

I was startled.

"Where have you kept it, then?" asked my sister−in−law.

"I have spent it."

"Just listen to her! Whatever did you spend all that money on?"

Bimal made no reply. I asked her nothing further. The Bara Rani seemed about to make some further remark to Bimala, but checked herself. "Well, that is all right, anyway," she said at length, as she looked towards me. "Just what I used to do with my husband's loose cash. I knew it was no use leaving it with him his hundred and one hangers−on would be sure to get hold of it. You are much the same, dear! What a number of ways you men know of getting through money. We can only save it from you by stealing it ourselves! Come along now. Off with you to bed."

The Bara Rani led me to my room, but I hardly knew where I was going. She sat by my bed after I was stretched on it, and smiled at Bimal as she said: "Give me one of your pans, Chotie darling what? You have none! You have become a regular mem−sahib. Then send for some from my room."

"But have you had your dinner yet?" I anxiously enquired.

"Oh long ago," she replied clearly a fib.

She kept on chattering away there at my bedside, on all manner of things. The maid came and told Bimal that her dinner had been served and was getting cold, but she gave no sign of having heard it. "Not had your dinner yet? What nonsense! It's fearfully late." With this the Bara Rani took Bimal away with her.

I could divine that there was some connection between the taking out of this six thousand and the robbing of the other. But I have no curiosity to learn the nature of it. I shall never ask.

Providence leaves our life moulded in the rough its object being that we ourselves should put the finishing touches, shaping it into its final form to our taste. There has always been the hankering within me to express some great idea in the process of giving shape to my life on the lines suggested by the Creator. In this endeavour I have spent all my days. How severely I have curbed my desires, repressed myself at every step, only the Searcher of the Heart knows.

But the difficulty is, that one's life is not solely one's own. He who would create it must do so with the help of his surroundings, or he will fail. So it was my constant dream to draw Bimal to join me in this work of creating myself. I loved her with all my soul; on the strength of that, I could not but succeed in winning her to my purpose that was my firm belief.

Then I discovered that those who could simply and naturally draw their environment into the process of their self−creation belonged to one species of the genus "man", and I to another. I had received the vital spark, but could not impart it. Those to whom I have surrendered my all have taken my all, but not myself with it.

My trial is hard indeed. Just when I want a helpmate most, I am thrown back on myself alone. Nevertheless, I record my vow that even in this trial I shall win through. Alone, then, shall I tread my thorny path to the end of this life's journey . . .

I have begun to suspect that there has all along been a vein of tyranny in me. There was a despotism in my desire to mould my relations with Bimala in a hard, clear−cut, perfect form. But man's life was not meant to be cast in a mould. And if we try to shape the good, as so much mere material, it takes a terrible revenge by losing its life.

I did not realize all this while that it must have been this unconscious tyranny of mine which made us gradually drift apart. Bimala's life, not finding its true level by reason of my pressure from above, has had to find an outlet by undermining its banks at the bottom. She has had to steal this six thousand rupees because she could not be open with me, because she felt that, in certain things, I despotically differed from her.

Men, such as I, possessed with one idea, are indeed at one with those who can manage to agree with us; but those who do not, can only get on with us by cheating us. It is our unyielding obstinacy, which drives even the simplest to tortuous ways. In trying to manufacture a helpmate, we spoil a wife.

Could I not go back to the beginning? Then, indeed, I should follow the path of the simple. I should not try to fetter my life's companion with my ideas, but play the joyous pipes of my love and say: "Do you love me? Then may you grow true to yourself in the light of your love. Let my suggestions be suppressed, let God's design, which is in you, triumph, and my ideas retire abashed."

But can even Nature's nursing heal the open wound, into which our accumulated differences have broken out? The covering veil, beneath the privacy of which Nature's silent forces alone can work, has been torn asunder. Wounds must be bandaged can we not bandage our wound with our love, so that the day may come when its scar will no longer be visible? It is not too late? So much time has been lost in misunderstanding; it

has taken right up to now to come to an understanding; how much more time will it take for the correcting? What if the wound does eventually heal? can the devastation it has wrought ever be made good?

There was a slight sound near the door. As I turned over I saw Bimala's retreating figure through the open doorway. She must have been waiting by the door, hesitating whether to come in or not, and at last have decided to go back. I jumped up and bounded to the door, calling: "Bimal."

She stopped on her way. She had her back to me. I went and took her by the hand and led her into our room. She threw herself face downwards on a pillow, and sobbed and sobbed. I said nothing, but held her hand as I sat by her head.

When her storm of grief had abated she sat up. I tried to draw her to my breast, but she pushed my arms away and knelt at my feet, touching them repeatedly with her head, in obeisance. I hastily drew my feet back, but she clasped them in her arms, saying in a choking voice: "No, no, no, you must not take away your feet. Let me do my worship."

I kept still. Who was I to stop her? Was I the god of her worship that I should have any qualms?

Bimala's Story

XXIII

Come, come! Now is the time to set sail towards that great confluence, where the river of love meets the sea of worship. In that pure blue all the weight of its muddiness sinks and disappears.

I now fear nothing neither myself, nor anybody else. I have passed through fire. What was inflammable has been burnt to ashes; what is left is deathless. I have dedicated myself to the feet of him, who has received all my sin into the depths of his own pain.

Tonight we go to Calcutta. My inward troubles have so long prevented my looking after my things. Now let me arrange and pack them.

After a while I found my husband had come in and was taking a hand in the packing.

"This won't do," I said. "Did you not promise me you would have a sleep?"

"I might have made the promise," he replied, "but my sleep did not, and it was nowhere to be found."

"No, no," I repeated, "this will never do. Lie down for a while, at least."

"But how can you get through all this alone?"

"Of course I can."

"Well, you may boast of being able to do without me. But frankly I can't do without you. Even sleep refused to come to me, alone, in that room." Then he set to work again.

But there was an interruption, in the shape of a servant, who came and said that Sandip Babu had called and had asked to be announced. I did not dare to ask whom he wanted. The light of the sky seemed suddenly to be shut down, like the leaves of a sensitive plant.

"Come, Bimal," said my husband. "Let us go and hear what Sandip has to tell us. Since he has come back again, after taking his leave, he must have something special to say."

I went, simply because it would have been still more embarrassing to stay. Sandip was staring at a picture on the wall. As we entered he said: "You must be wondering why the fellow has returned. But you know the ghost is never laid till all the rites are complete." With these words he brought out of his pocket something tied in his handkerchief, and laying it on the table, undid the knot. It was those sovereigns.

"Don't you mistake me, Nikhil," he said. "You must not imagine that the contagion of your company has suddenly turned me honest; I am not the man to come back in slobbering repentance to return ill−gotten money. But. . ."

He left his speech unfinished. After a pause he turned towards Nikhil, but said to me: "After all these days, Queen Bee, the ghost of compunction has found an entry into my hitherto untroubled conscience. As I have to wrestle with it every night, after my first sleep is over, I cannot call it a phantom of my imagination. There is no escape even for me till its debt is paid. Into the hands of that spirit, therefore, let me make restitution. Goddess! From you, alone, of all the world, I shall not be able to take away anything. I shall not be rid of you till I am destitute. Take these back!"

He took out at the same time the jewel−casket from under his tunic and put it down, and then left us with hasty steps.

"Listen to me, Sandip," my husband called after him.

"I have not the time, Nikhil," said Sandip as he paused near the door. "The Mussulmans, I am told, have taken me for an invaluable gem, and are conspiring to loot me and hide me away in their graveyard. But I feel that it is necessary that I should live. I have just twenty−five minutes to catch the North−bound train. So, for the present, I must be gone. We shall have our talk out at the next convenient opportunity. lf you take my advice, don't you delay in getting away either. I salute you, Queen Bee, Queen of the bleeding hearts, Queen of desolation!"

Sandip then left almost at a run. I stood stock−still; I had never realized in such a manner before, how trivial, how paltry, this gold and these jewels were. Only a short while ago I was so busy thinking what I should take with me, and how I should pack it. Now I felt that there was no need to take anything at all. To set out and go forth was the important thing.

My husband left his seat and came up and took me by the hand. "It is getting late," he said. "There is not much time left to complete our preparations for the journey."

At this point Chandranath Babu suddenly came in. Finding us both together, he fell back for a moment. Then he said, "Forgive me, my little mother, if I intrude. Nikhil, the Mussulmans are out of hand. They are looting Harish Kundu's treasury. That does not so much matter. But what is intolerable is the violence that is being done to the women of their house."

"I am off," said my husband.

"What can you do there?" I pleaded, as I held him by the hand. "Oh, sir," I appealed to his master. "Will you not tell him not to go?"

"My little mother," he replied, "there is no time to do anything else."

"Don't be alarmed, Bimal," said my husband, as he left us.

When I went to the window I saw my husband galloping away on horseback, with not a weapon in his hands.

In another minute the Bara Rani came running in. "What have you done, Chotie darling," she cried. "How could you let him go?"

"Call the Dewan at once," she said, turning to a servant.

The Ranis never appeared before the Dewan, but the Bara Rani had no thought that day for appearances.

"Send a mounted man to bring back the Maharaja at once," she said, as soon as the Dewan came up.

"We have all entreated him to stay, Rani Mother," said the Dewan, "but he refused to turn back."

"Send word to him that the Bara Rani is ill, that she is on her death−bed," cried my sister−in−law wildly.

When the Dewan had left she turned on me with a furious outburst. "Oh, you witch, you ogress, you could not die yourself, but needs must send him to his death! . . ."

The light of the day began to fade. The sun set behind the feathery foliage of the blossoming *Sajna* tree. I can see every different shade of that sunset even today. Two masses of cloud on either side of the sinking orb made it look like a great bird with fiery−feathered wings outspread. It seemed to me that this fateful day was taking its flight, to cross the ocean of night.

It became darker and darker. Like the flames of a distant village on fire, leaping up every now and then above the horizon, a distant din swelled up in recurring waves into the darkness.

The bells of the evening worship rang out from our temple. I knew the Bara Rani was sitting there, with palms joined in silent prayer. But I could not move a step from the window.

The roads, the village beyond, and the still more distant fringe of trees, grew more and more vague. The lake in our grounds looked up into the sky with a dull lustre, like a blind man's eye. On the left the tower seemed to be craning its neck to catch sight of something that was happening.

The sounds of night take on all manner of disguises. A twig snaps, and one thinks that somebody is running for his life. A door slams, and one feels it to be the sudden heart−thump of a startled world.

Lights would suddenly flicker under the shade of the distant trees, and then go out again. Horses' hoofs would clatter, now and again, only to turn out to be riders leaving the palace gates.

I continually had the feeling that, if only I could die, all this turmoil would come to an end. So long as I was alive my sins would remain rampant, scattering destruction on every side. I remembered the pistol in my box. But my feet refused to leave the window in quest of it. Was I not awaiting my fate?

The gong of the watch solemnly struck ten. A little later, groups of lights appeared in the distance and a great crowd wound its way, like some great serpent, along the roads in the darkness, towards the palace gates.

The Dewan rushed to the gate at the sound. Just then a rider came galloping in. "What's the news, Jata?" asked the Dewan.

"Not good," was the reply.

I could hear these words distinctly from my window. But something was next whispered which I could not catch.

Then came a palanquin, followed by a litter. The doctor was walking alongside the palanquin.

"What do you think, doctor?" asked the Dewan.

"Can't say yet," the doctor replied. "The wound in the head is a serious one."

"And Amulya Babu?"

"He has a bullet through the heart. He is done for."

The King of the Dark Chamber

Rabindranath Tagore

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The King of the Dark Chamber

Rabindranath Tagore

I

[*A street. A few wayfarers, and a CITY GUARD*]

First Man. Ho, Sir!

City Guard. What do you want?

Second Man. Which way should we go? We are strangers here. Please tell us which street we should take.

City Guard. Where do you want to go?

Third Man. To where those big festivities are going to be held, you know. Which way do we go?

City Guard. One street is quite as good as another here. Any street will lead you there. Go straight ahead, and you cannot miss the place. [*Exit.*]

First Man. Just hear what the fool says: "Any street will lead you there!" Where, then, would be the sense of having so many streets?

Second Man. You needn't be so awfully put out at that, my man. A country is free to arrange its affairs in its own way. As for roads in our country well, they are as good as non−existent; narrow and crooked lanes, a labyrinth of ruts and tracks. Our King does not believe in open thoroughfares; he thinks that streets are just so many openings for his subjects to fly away from his kingdom. It is quite the contrary here; nobody stands in your way, nobody objects to your going elsewhere if you like to; and yet the people are far from deserting this kingdom. With such streets our country would certainly have been depopulated in no time.

First Man. My dear Janardan, I have always noticed that this is a great fault in your character.

Janardan. What is?

First Man. That you are always having a fling at your country. How can you think that open highways may be good for a country? Look here, Kaundilya; here is a man who actually believes that open highways are the salvation of a country.

Kaundilya. There is no need, Bhavadatta, of my pointing out afresh that Janardan is blessed with an intelligence which is remarkably crooked, which is sure to land him in danger some day. If the King comes to hear of our worthy friend, he will make it a pretty hard job for him to find any one to do him his funeral rites when he is dead.

Bhavadatta. One can't help feeling that life becomes a burden in this country; one misses the joys of privacy in these streets this jostling and brushing shoulders with strange people day and night makes one long for a bath. And nobody can tell exactly what kind of people you are meeting with in these public roads ugh!

Kaundilya. And it is Janardan who persuaded us to come to this precious country! We never had any second person like him in our family. You knew my father, of course; he was a great man, a pious man if ever there was one. He spent his whole life within a circle of a radius of 49 cubits drawn with a rigid adherence to the injunctions of the scriptures, and never for a single day did he cross this circle. After his death a serious difficulty arose how cremate him within the limits of the 49 cubits and yet outside the house? At length the priests decided that though we could not go beyond the scriptural number, the only way out of the difficulty was to reverse the figure and make it 94 cubits; only thus could we cremate him outside the house without violating the sacred books. My word, that was strict observance! Ours is indeed no common country.

Bhavadatta. And yet, though Janardan comes from the very same soil, he thinks it wise to declare that open highways are best for a country.

[*Enter GRANDFATHER with a band of boys*]

Grandfather. Boys, we will have to vie with the wild breeze of the south to−day and we are not going to be beaten. We will sing till we have flooded all streets with our mirth and song.

Song.

The southern gate is unbarred. Come, my spring, come!
Thou wilt swing at the swing of my heart, come, my spring, come!
Come in the lisping leaves, in the youthful surrender of flowers;
Come in the flute songs and the wistful sighs of the woodlands!
Let your unfastened robe wildly flap in the drunken wind!

Come, my spring, come!

[*Exeunt.*]

[*Enter a band of CITIZENS*]

First Citizen. After all, one cannot help wishing that the King had allowed himself to be seen at least this one day. What a great pity, to live in his kingdom and yet not to have seen him for a single day!

Second Citizen. If you only knew the real meaning of all this mystery! I could tell you if you would keep a secret.

First Citizen. My dear fellow, we both live in the same quarter of the town, but have you ever known me letting out any man s secret? Of course, that matter of your brother's finding a hidden fortune while digging for a well well, you know well enough why I had to give it out. You know all the facts.

Second Citizen. Of course I know. And it is because I know that I ask, could you keep a secret if I tell you? It may mean ruination to us all, you know, if you once let it out.

Third Citizen. You are a nice man, after all, Virupaksha! Why are you so anxious to bring down a disaster which as yet only may happen? Who will be responsible for keeping your secret all his life?

Virupaksha. It is only because the topic came up well, then, I shall not say anything. I am not the man to say things for nothing. You had yourself brought up the question that the King never showed himself; and I only remarked that it was not for nothing that the King shut himself up from the public gaze.

First Citizen. Pray do tell us why, Virupaksha.

Virupaksha. Of course I don't mind telling you for we are all good friends, aren't we? There can be no harm. (With a low voice.) The King is hideous to look at, so he has made up his mind never to show himself to his subjects.

First Citizen. Ha! that's it! It must be so. We have always wondered . . . why, the mere sight of a King in all countries makes one's soul quake like an aspen leaf with fear; but why should our King never have been seen by any mortal soul? Even if he at least came out and consigned us all to the gibbet, we might be sure that our King was no hoax. After all, there is much in Virupaksha's explanation that sounds plausible enough.

Third Citizen. Not a bit I don't believe in a syllable of it.

Virupaksha. What, Vishu, do you mean to say that I am a liar?

Vishu. I don't exactly mean that but I cannot accept your theory. Excuse me, I cannot help if I seem a bit rude or churlish.

Virupaksha. Small wonder that you can't believe my words you who think yourself sage enough to reject the opinions of your parents and superiors. How long do you think you could have stayed in this country if the King did not remain in hiding? You are no better than a flagrant heretic.

Vishu. My dear pillar of orthodoxy! Do you think any other King would have hesitated to cut off your tongue and make it food for dogs? And you have the face to say that our King is horrid to look at!

Virupaksha. Look here, Vishu. will you curb your tongue?

Vishu. It would be superfluous to point out whose tongue needs the curbing.

First Citizen. Hush, my dear friends this looks rather bad. . . . It seems as if they are resolved to put me in danger as well. I am not going to be a party to all this.[*Exit.*]

[*Enter a number of men, dragging in GRANDFATHER, in boisterous exuberance*]

Second Citizen. Grandpa, something strikes me to−day . . .

Grandfather. What is it?

Second Citizen. This year every country has sent its people to our festival, but every one asks, "Everything is nice and beautiful but where is your King?" and we do not know what to answer. That is the one big gap which cannot but make itself felt to every one in our country.

Grandfather. "Gap," do you say! Why, the whole country is all filled and crammed and packed with the King: and you call him a "gap"! Why,he has made every one of us a crowned King!

Sings.

We are all Kings in the kingdom of our King.
Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart to meet him!
We do what we like, yet we do what he likes;
We are not bound with the chain of fear at the feet of a slave−owning King.
Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart to meet him!
Our King honours each one of us, thus honours his own very self.
No littleness can keep us shut up in its walls of untruth for aye.
Were it not so, how could we have hope in our heart to meet him!
We struggle and dig our own path, thus reach his path at the end.
We can never get lost in the abyss of dark night.
Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart to meet him!

Third Citizen. But, really, I cannot stand the absurd things people say about our King simply because he is not seen in public.

First Citizen. Just fancy! Any one libelling me can be punished, while nobody can stop the mouth of any rascal who chooses to slander the King.

Grandfather. The slander cannot touch the King. With a mere breath you can blow out the flame which a lamp inherits from the sun, but if all the world blow upon the sun itself its effulgence remains undimmed and unimpaired as before.

[*Enter VISHVAVASU and VIRUPAKSHA*]

Vishu. Here's Grandfather! Look here, this man is going about telling everybody that our King does not come out because he is ugly.

Grandfather. But why does that make you angry, Vishu? His King must be ugly, because how else could Virupaksha possess such features in his kingdom? He fashions his King after the image of himself he sees in

the mirror.

Virupaksha. Grandfather, I shall mention no names, but nobody would think of disbelieving the person who gave me the news.

Grandfather. Who could be a higher authority than yourself!

Virupaksha. But I could give you proofs . . .

First Citizen. The impudence of this fellow knows no bounds! Not content with spreading a ghastly rumour with an unabashed face, he offers to measure his lies with insolence!

Second Citizen. Why not make him measure his length on the ground?

Grandfather. Why so much heat, my friends? The poor fellow is going to have his own festive day by singing the ugliness of his King. Go along, Virupaksha, you will find plenty of people ready to believe you: may you be happy in their company.[*Exeunt.*]

[*Re−enter the party of FOREIGNERS*]

Bhavadatta. It strikes me, Kaundilya, that these people haven't got a King at all. They have somehow managed to keep the rumour afloat.

Kaundilya. You are right, I think. We all know that the supreme thing that strikes one's eye in any country is the King, who of course loses no opportunity of exhibiting himself.

Janardan. But look at the nice order and regularity prevailing all over the place how do you explain it without a King?

Bhavadatta. So this is the wisdom you have arrived at by living so long under a ruler! Where would be the necessity of having a King if order and harmony existed already?

Janardan. All these people have assembled to rejoice at this festival. Do you think they could come together like this in a country of anarchy?

Rhavadatta. My dear Janardan, you are evading the real issue, as usual. There can be no question about the order and regularity, and the festive rejoicing too is plain enough: there is no difficulty so far. But where is the King? Have you seen him? Just tell us that.

Janardan. What I want to say is this: you know from your experience that there can be chaos and anarchy even if a King be present: but what do we see here?

Kaundilya. You are always coming back to your quibbling. Why can you not give a straight answer to Bhavadatta's question Have you, or have you not, seen the King? Yes or no? [*Exeunt.*]

[*Enter a band of MEN, singing*]

Song.

My beloved is ever in my heart
  That is why I see him everywhere,

He is in the pupils of my eyes
That is why I see him everywhere.
I went far away to hear his own words,
But, ah, it was vain!
When I came back I heard them
In my own songs.
Who are you who seek him like a beggar
from door to door!
Come to my heart and see his face in the
tears of my eyes!

[*Enter HERALDS and ADVANCE GUARDS of the KING*]

First Herald. Stand off! Get away from the street, all of you!

First Citizen. Eh, man, who do you think you are? You weren't of course born with such lofty strides, my friend? Why should we stand off, my dear sir? Why should we budge? Are we street dogs, or what?

Second Herald. Our King is coming this way.

Second Citizen. King? Which King?

First Herald. Our King, the King of this country.

First Citizen. What, is the fellow mad? Whoever heard of our King coming out heralded by these vociferous gentry?

Second Herald. The King will no longer deny himself to his subjects. He is coming to command the festivities himself.

Second Citizen. Brother, is that so?

Second Herald. Look, his banner is flying over there.

Second Citizen. Ah, yes, that is a flag indeed.

Second Herald. Do you see the red *Kimshuk* flower painted on it?

Second Citizen. Yes, yes, it is the *Kimshuk* indeed! what a bright scarlet flower!

First Herald. Well! do you believe us now?

Second Citizen. I never said I didn't. That fellow Kumbha started all this fuss. Did I say a word?

First Herald. Perhaps, though a pot−bellied man, he is quite empty inside; an empty vessel sounds most, you know.

Second Herald. Who is he? Is he any kinsman of yours?

Second Citizen. Not at all. He is just a cousin of our village chief's father−in−law, and he does not even live in the same part of our village with us.

Second Herald. Just so: he quite looks the seventh cousin of somebody's father−in−law, and his understanding appears also to bear the stamp of uncle−in−lawhood.

Kumbha. Alas, my friends, many a bitter sorrow has given my poor mind a twist before it has become like this. It is only the other day that a King came and paraded the streets, with as many titles in front of him as the drums that made the town hideous by their din, . . . What did I not do to serve and please him! I rained presents on him, I hung about him like a beggar and in the end I found the strain on my resources too hard to bear. But what was the end of all that pomp and majesty? When people sought grants and presents from him, he could not somehow discover an auspicious day in the Calendar: though all days were red−letter days when *we* had to pay our taxes!

Second Herald. Do you mean to insinuate that our King is a bogus King like the one you have described?

First Herald. Mr. Uncle−in−law, I believe the time has come for you to say good−bye to Aunty−in−law.

Kumbha. Please, sirs, do not take any offence. I am a poor creature my sincerest apologies, sirs: I will do anything to be excused. I am quite willing to move away as far as you like.

Second Herald. All right, come here and form a line. The King will come just now we shall go and prepare the way for him. [*They go out.*]

Second Citizen. My dear Kumbha, your tongue will be your death one day.

Kumbha. Friend Madhav, it isn't my tongue, it is fate. When the bogus King appeared I never said a word, though that did not prevent my striking at my own feet with all the self−confidence of innocence. And now, when perhaps the real King has come, I simply must blurt out treason. It is fate, my dear friend!

Madhav. My faith is, to go on obeying the King it does not matter whether he is a real one or a pretender. What do we know of Kings that we should judge them! It is like throwing stones in the dark you are almost sure of hitting your mark. I go on obeying and acknowledging if it is a real King, well and good: if not, what harm is there?

Kumbha. I should not have minded if the stones were nothing better than stones. But they are often precious things: here, as elsewhere, extravagance lands us in poverty, my friend.

Madhav. Look! There comes the King! Ah, a King indeed! What a figure, what a face! Whoever saw such beauty lily−white, creamy−soft! What now, Kumbha? What do you think now?

Kumbha. He looks all right yes, he may be the real King for all I know.

Madhav. He looks as if he were moulded and carved for kingship, a figure too exquisite and delicate for the common light of day.

[*Enter the "KING"*]

Madhav. Prosperity and victory attend thee, O King! We have been standing here to have a sight of thee since the early morning. Forget us not, your Majesty, in your favours.

Kumbha. The mystery deepens. I will go and call Grandfather.[*Goes out.*]

[*Enter another band of MEN*]

First Man. The King, the King! Come along, quick, the King is passing this way.

Second Man. Do not forget me, O King! I am Vivajadatta, the grandson of Udayadatta of Kushalivastu. I came here at the first report of thy coming I did not stop to hear what people were saying: all the loyalty in me went out towards thee, O Monarch, and brought me here.

Third Man. Rubbish! I came here earlier than you before the cockcrow. Where were you then? O King, I am Bhadrasena, of Vikramasthali. Deign to keep thy servant in thy memory!

King. I am much pleased with your loyalty and devotion.

Vivajadatta. Your Majesty, many are the grievances and complaints we have to make to thee: to whom could we turn our prayers so long, when we could not approach thy august presence?

King. Your grievances will all be redressed. [*Exit.*]

First Man. It won't do to lag behind, boys the King will lose sight of us if we get mixed up with the mob.

Second Man. See there−look what that fool Narottam is doing! He has elbowed his way through all of us and is now sedulously fanning the King with a palm leaf!

Madhav. Indeed! Well, well, the sheer audacity of the man takes one's breath away.

Second Man. We shall have to pitch the fellow out of that place is he fit to stand beside the King?

Madhav. Do you imagine the King will not see through him? His loyalty is obviously a little too showy and profuse.

First Man. Nonsense! Kings can't scent hypocrites as we do I should not be surprised if the King be taken in by that fool's strenuous fanning.

[*Enter KUMBHA with GRANDFATHER*]

Kumbha. I tell you he has just passed by this street.

Grandfather . Is that a very infallible test of Kingship?

Kumbha. Oh no, he did not pass unobserved: not one or two men but hundreds and thousands on both sides of the street have seen him with their own eyes.

Grandfather. That is exactly what makes the whole affair suspicious. When ever has our King set out to dazzle the eyes of the people by pomp and pageantry? He is not the King to make such a thundering row over his progress through the country.

Kumbha. But he may just have chosen to do so on this important occasion: you cannot really tell.

Grandfather. Oh yes, you can! My King cherishes no weathercock fancy, no fantastic vein.

Kumbha. But, Grandfather, I wish I could only describe him! So soft, so delicate and exquisite like a waxen doll! As I looked on him, I yearned to shelter him from the sun, to protect him with my whole body.

Grandfather. Fool, O precious ass that you are! *My* King a waxen doll, and *you* to protect him!

Kumbha. But seriously, Grandpa, he is a superb god, a miracle of beauty: I do not find a single other figure in this vast assembly that can stand beside his peerless loveliness.

Grandfather. If my King chose to make himself shown, your eyes would not have noticed him. He would not stand out like that amongst others he is one of the people, he mingles with the common populace.

Kumbha. But did I not tell you I saw his banner?

Grandfather. What did you see displayed on his banner?

Kumbha. It had a red *Kimshuk* flower painted on it the bright and glittering scarlet dazzled my eyes.

Grandfather. *My* King has a thunderbolt within a lotus painted on his flag.

Kumbha. But every one is saying, the King is out in this festival: *every one.*

Grandfather. Why, so he is, of course: but he has no heralds, no army, no retinue, no music bands or lights to accompany him.

Kumbha. So none could recognise him in his incognito, it seems.

Grandfather. Perhaps there are a few that can.

Kumbha. And those that can recognise him does the King grant them whatever they ask for?

Grandfather. But they never ask for anything. No beggar will ever know the King. The greater beggar appears like the King to the eyes of the lesser beggar. O fool, the man that has come out to−day attired in crimson and gold to beg from you it is him whom you are trumpeting as your King! . . . Ah, there comes my mad friend! Oh come, my brothers! we cannot spend the day in idle wrangling and prating let us now have some mad frolic, some wild enjoyment!

[*Enter the MAD FRIEND, who sings*]

Do you smile, my friends? Do you laugh, my brothers? I roam in search of the golden stag! Ah yes, the fleet−foot vision that ever eludes me!

Oh, he flits and glimpses like a flash and then is gone, the untamed rover of the wilds! Approach him and he is afar in a trice, leaving a cloud of haze and dust before thy eyes!

Yet I roam in search of the golden stag, though I may never catch him in these wilds! Oh, I roam and wander through woods and fields and nameless lands like a restless vagabond, never caring to turn my back.

You all come and buy in the marketplace and go back to your homes laden with goods and provisions: but me the wild winds of unscalable heights have touched and kissed Oh, I know not when or where!

I have parted with my all to get what never has become mine! And yet think my moanings and my tears are for the things I thus have lost!

With a laugh and a song in my heart I have left all sorrow and grief far behind me: Oh, I roam and wander

through woods and fields and nameless lands never caring to turn my vagabond's back!

II

[*A DarkChamber. QUEEN SUDARSHANA. Her Maid of Honour, SURANGAMA*]

Sudarshana. Light, light! Where is light? Will the lamp never be lighted in this chamber?

Surangama. My Queen, all your other rooms are lighted will you never long to escape from the light into a dark room like this?

Sudarshana. But why should this room be kept dark?

Surangama. Because otherwise you would know neither light nor darkness.

Sudarshana. Living in this dark room you have grown to speak darkly and strangely I cannot understand you, Surangama. But tell me, in what part of the palace is this chamber situated? I cannot make out either the entrance or the way out of this room.

Surangama. This room is placed deep down, in the very heart of the earth. The King has built this room specially for your sake.

Sudarshana. Why, he has no dearth of rooms why need he have made this chamber of darkness specially for me?

Surangama. You can meet others in the lighted rooms: but only in this dark room can you meet your lord.

Sudarshana. No, no I cannot live without light I am restless in this stifling dark. Surangama, if you can bring a light into this room, I shall give you this necklace of mine.

Surangama. It is not in my power, O Queen. How can I bring light to a place which he would have kept always dark!

Sudarshana. Strange devotion! And yet, is it not true that the King punished your father?

Surangama. Yes, that is true. My father used to gamble. All the young men of the country used to gather at my father's house−and they used to drink and gamble.

Sudarshana. And when the King sent away your father in exile, did it not make you feel bitterly oppressed?

Surangama. Oh, it made me quite furious. I was on the road to ruin and destruction: when that path was closed for me, I seemed left without any support, without any succour or shelter. I raged and raved like a wild beast in a cage how I wanted to tear every one to pieces in my powerless anger!

Sudarshana. But how did you get this devotion towards that same King?

Sarangama . How can I tell? Perhaps I could rely and depend on him because he was so hard, so pitiless!

Sudarshana. When did this change of feeling take place?

Surangama. I could not tell you I do not know that myself. A day came when all the rebel in me knew itself beaten, and then my whole nature bowed down in humble resignation on the dust of the earth. And then I saw . . . I saw that he was as matchless in beauty as in terror. Oh. I was saved, I was rescued.

Sudarshana. Tell me, Surangama, I implore you, won't you tell me what is the King like to look at? I have not seen him yet for a single day. He comes to me in darkness, and leaves me in this dark room again. How many people have I not asked but they all return vague and dark answers it seems to me that they all keep back something.

Surangama. To tell you the truth, Queen, I could not say well what he is like. No he is not what men call handsome.

Sudarshana. You don't say so? Not handsome!

Surangama. No, my Queen, he is not handsome. To call him beautiful would be to say far too little about him.

Sudarshana. All your words are like that dark, strange, and vague. I cannot understand what you mean.

Surangama. No, I will *not* call him handsome. And it is because he is not beautiful that he is so wonderful, so superb, so miraculous!

Sudarshana. I do not quite understand you though I like to hear you talk about him. But I must see him at any cost. I do not even remember the day when I was married to him. I have heard mother say that a wise man came before my marriage and said, "He who will wed your daughter is without a second on this earth." How often have I asked her to describe his appearance to me, but she only answers vaguely, and says she cannot say she saw him through a veil, faintly and obscurely. But if he is the best among men, how can I sit still without seeing him?

Surangama. Do you not feel a faint breeze blowing?

Sudarshana. A breeze? Where?

Surangama. Do you not smell a soft perfume?

Sudarshana. No, I don't.

Surangama. The large door has opened . . . he is coming; my King is coming in.

Sudarshana. How can you perceive when he comes?

Surangama. I cannot say: I seem to hear his footsteps in my own heart. Being his servant of this dark chamber, I have developed a sense−I can know and feel without seeing.

Sudarshana. Would that I had this sense too, Surangama!

Surangama. You will have it, O Queen . . . this sense will awaken in you one day. Your longing to have a sight of him makes you restless, and therefore all your mind is strained and warped in that direction. When you are past this state of feverish restlessness, everything will become quite easy.

Sudarshana. How is it that it is easy to you, who are a servant, and so difficult to me, the Queen?

Surangama. It is because I am a mere servant that no difficulty baulks me. On the first day, when he left this room to my care, saying, "Surangama, you will always keep this chamber ready for me: this is all your task," then I did not say, even in thought, "Oh, give me the work of those who keep the other rooms lighted." No, but as soon as I bent all my mind to my task, a power woke and grew within me, and mastered every part of me unopposed. . . . Oh, there he comes! . . . he is standing outside, before the door. Lord! O King!

Song outside.

Open your door. I am waiting.
The ferry of the light from the dawn to the dark is done for the day,
The evening star is up.
Have you gathered your flowers, braided your hair,
And donned your white robe for the night?
The cattle have come to their folds and birds to their nests.
The cross paths that run to all quarters have merged into one in the dark.
Open your door. I am waiting.

Surangama. O King, who can keep thy own doors shut against thee? They are not locked or bolted they will swing wide open if you only touch them with thy fingers. Wilt thou not even touch them? Wilt thou not enter unless I go and open the doors?

Song.

At a breath you can remove my veils, my lord!
If I fall asleep on the dust and hear not your call, would you wait till I wake?
Would not the thunder of your chariot wheel make the earth tremble?
Would you not burst open the door and enter your own house unbidden?

Then do you go, O Queen, and open the door for him: he will not enter otherwise.

Sudarshana. I do not see anything distinctly in the dark I do not know where the doors are. You know everything here go and open the doors for me.

[*SURANGAMA opens the door, bows to the KING, and goes out. The KING will remain invisible throughout this play.*]

Sudarshana. Why do you not allow me to see you in the light?

King. So you want to see me in the midst of a thousand things in broad daylight! Why should I not be the only thing you can feel in this darkness?

Sudarshana. But I must see you I am longing to have a sight of you.

King. You will not be able to bear the sight of me it will only give you pain, poignant and overpowering.

Sudarshana. How can you say that I shall be unable to bear your sight? Oh, I can feel even in this dark how lovely and wonderful you are: why should I be afraid of you in the light? But tell me, can you see me in the dark?

King. Yes, I can.

Sudarshana. What do you see?

King. I see that the darkness of the infinite heavens, whirled into life and being by the power of my love, has drawn the light of a myriad stars into itself, and incarnated itself in a form of flesh and blood. And in that form, what acons of thought and striving, untold yearnings of limitless skies, the countless gifts of unnumbered seasons!

Sudarshana. Am I so wonderful, so beautiful? When I hear you speak so, my heart swells with gladness and pride. But how can I believe the wonderful things you tell me? I cannot find them in myself!

King. Your own mirror will not reflect them it lessens you, limits you, makes you look small and insignificant. But could you see yourself mirrored in my own mind, how grand would you appear! In my own heart you are no longer the daily individual which you think you are you are verily my second self.

Sudarshana. Oh, do show me for an instant how to see with your eyes! Is there nothing at all like darkness to you? I am afraid when I think of this. This darkness which is to me real and strong as death is this simply nothing to you? Then how can there be any union at all between us, in a place like this? No, no−it is impossible: there is a barrier betwixt us two: not here, no, not in this place. I want to find you and see you where I see trees and animals, birds and stones and the earth

King. Very well, you can try to find me but none will point me out to you. You will have to recognise me, if you can, yourself. And even if anybody professes to show me to you, how can you be sure he is speaking the truth?

Sudarshana. I shall know you; I shall recognise you. I shall find you out among a million men. I cannot be mistaken.

King. Very well, then, to−night, during the festival of the full moon of the spring, you will try to find me out from the high turret of my palace search for me with your own eyes amongst the crowd of people.

Sudarshana. Wilt thou be there among them?

King. I shall show myself again and again, from every side of the crowd. Surangama!

[*Enter SURANGAMA*]

Surangama. What is thy pleasure, lord?

King. To−night is the full moon festival of the spring.

Surangama. What have I to do to−night?

King. To−day is a festive day, not a day of work. The pleasure gardens are in their full bloom you will join in my festivities there.

Surangama. I shall do as thou desirest, lord.

King. The Queen wants to see me to−night with her own eyes.

Surangama. Where will the Queen see you?

King. Where the music will play at its sweetest, where the air will be heavy with the dust of flowers there in the pleasure grove of silver light and mellow gloom.

Surangama. What can be seen in the hide−and−seek of darkness and light? There the wind is wild and restless, everything is dance and swift movement will it not puzzle the eyes?

King. The Queen is curious to search me out.

Surangama. Curiosity will have to come back baffled and in tears!

Song.

Ah, they would fly away, the restless vagrant eyes, the wild birds of the forest!
But the time of their surrender will come, their flights hither and thither will be ended when
The music of enchantment will pursue them and pierce their hearts.
Alas, the wild birds would fly to the wilderness!

III

[*Before the Pleasure Gardens. Enter AVANTI, KOSHALA, KANCHI, and other KINGS*]

Avanti. Will the King of this place not receive us?

Kanchi. What manner of governing a country is this? The King is having a festival in a forest, where even the meanest and commonest people can have easy access!

Koshala. We ought to have had a separate place set apart and ready for our reception.

Kanchi. If he has not prepared such a place yet, we shall compel him to have one erected for us.

Koshala. All this makes one naturally suspect if these people have really got any King at all it looks as if an unfounded rumour has led us astray.

Avanti. It may be so with regard to the King, but the Queen Sudarshana of this place isn't at all an unfounded rumour.

Koshala. It is only for her sake that I have cared to come at all. I don't mind omitting to see one who never makes himself visible, but it would be a stupid Inistake if we were to go away without a sight of one who is eminently worth a visit.

Kanchi. Let us make some definite plan, then.

Avanti. A plan is an excellent thing, so long as you are not yourself entangled in it.

Kanchi. Hang it, who are these vermin swarming this way? Here! who are you?

[*Enter GRANDFATHER and the boys*]

Grandfather. We are the Jolly Band of Have−Nothings.

Avanti. The introduction was superfluous. But you will take yourselves away a little further and leave us in peace.

Grandfather. We never suffer from a want of space: we can afford to give you as wide a berth as you like. What little suffices for us is never the bone of contention between any rival claimants. Is not that so, my little friends? [*They sing.*]

Song.

We have nothing, indeed we have nothing at all!
We sing merrily fol de rol de rol!
Some build high walls of their houses
On the bog of the sands of gold.
We stand before them and sing
Fol de rol de rol.
Pickpockets hover about us
And honour us with covetous glances.
We shake our empty pockets and sing
Fol de rol de rol.
When death, the old hag, steals to our doors
We snap our fingers at her face,
And we sing in a chorus with gay flourishes
Fol de rol de rol.

Kanchi. Look over there, Koshala, who are those coming this way? A pantomime? Somebody is out masquerading as a King.

Koshala. The King of this place may tolerate all this tomfoolery, but we won't.

Avanti. He is perhaps some rural chief.

[*Enter GUARDS on foot*]

Kanchi. What country does your King come from?

First Soldier. He is the King of this country. He is going to command the festivities. [*They go out.*]

Koshala. What! The King of this country come out for the festivities!

Avanti. Indeed! We shall then have to return with a sight of him only leaving the delectable Queen unseen.

Kanchi. Do you really think that fellow spoke the truth? Anybody can pass himself off as the King of this kingless country. Can you not see that the man looks like a dressed−up King much too over−dressed?

Avanti. But he looks handsome his appearance is not without a certain pleasing attractiveness.

Kanchi. He may be pleasing to your eye, but if you look at him closely enough there can be no mistaking

him . You will see how I expose him before you all.

[*Enter the trumped−up "KING."*]

"King". Welcome, princes, to our kingdom! I trust your reception has been properly looked after by my officials?

Kings. [*with feigned courtesy*] Oh yes nothing was lacking in the reception.

Kanchi. If there was any shortcoming at all, it has been made up by the honour of our sight of your Majesty.

"King". We do not show ourselves to the general public, but your great devotion and loyalty to us has made it a pleasure for us not to deny ourselves to you.

Kanchi. It is truly hard for us, your Majesty, to bear the weight of your gracious favours.

"King". We are afraid we shall not be able to stop here long.

Kanchi. I have thought so, already: you do not quite look up to it.

"King". In the meantime if you have any favours to ask of us

Kanchi. We have: but we would like to speak a little more in private.

"King". [*to his attendants*] Retire a little from our presence. (They retire.) Now you can express your desires without any reserve.

Kanchi. There will be no reserve on our part our only fear is that you might think restraint necessary for yourself.

"King". Oh no, you need have no scruples on that score.

Kanchi. Come, then, do us honage by placing your head on the ground before us.

"King". It seems my servants have distributed the Varuni spirits too liberally in the reception camps.

Kanchi. False pretender, it is you who are suffering from an overdose of arrogant spirits. Your head will soon kiss the dust.

"King". Princes, these heavy jokes are not worthy of a king.

Kanchi. Those who will jest properly with you are near at hand. General!

"King". No more, I entreat you. I can see plainly I owe homage to you all. The head is bowing down of itself there is no need for the application of any sharp methods to lay it low. So here I do my obeisance to you all. If you kindly allow me to escape I shall not inflict my presence long on you.

Kanchi. Why should you escape? We will make you king of this place let us carry our joke to its legitimate finish. Have you got any following?

"King". I have. Every one who sees me in the streets flocks after me. When I had a meagre retinue at first

every one regarded me with suspicion, but now with the increasing crowd their doubts are waning and dissolving. The crowd is being hypnotised by its own magnitude. I have not got to do anything now.

Kanchi. That's excellent! From this moment we all promise to help and stand by you. But you will have to do us one service in return.

"King". Your commands and the crown you are putting on my head will be equally binding and sacred to me.

Kanchi. At present we want nothing more than a sight of the Queen Sudarshana. You will have to see to this.

"King". I shall spare no pains for that.

Kanchi. We cannot put much faith on your pains you will be solely directed by our instructions. But now you can go and join the festivities in the royal arbour with all possible splendour and magnificence.[*They go out.*]

[*Enter GRANDFATHER and a band of people*]

First Citizen. Grandfather, I cannot help saying yes, and repeating it five hundred times that our King is a perfect fraud.

Grandfather. Why only five hundred times? There is no need to practise such heroic self−control you can say it five thousand times if that adds to your pleasure.

Second Citizen. But you cannot keep up a dead lie forever.

Grandfather. It has made me alive, my friend.

Third Citizen. We shall proclaim to the whole world that our King is a lie, the merest and emptiest shadow!

First Citizen. We shall all shout from our housetops that we have no King let him do whatever he likes if he exists.

Grandfather. He will do nothing at all.

Second Citizen. My son died untimely at twenty−five of raging fever in seven days. Could such a calamity befall me under the rule of a virtuous King?

Grandfather. But you still have got two sons left: while I have lost all my five children one after another.

Third Citizen. What do you say now?

Grandfather. What then? Shall I lose my King too because I have lost my children? Don't take me for such a big fool as that.

First Citizen. It is a fine thing to argue whether there is a King or not when one is simply starving for want of food! Will the King save us?

Grandfather. Brother, you are right. But why not *find* the King who owns all the food? You certainly will not find by your wailings at home.

Second Citizen. Look at the justice of our King! That Bhadrasen you know what a touching sight he is when he is speaking of his King the sentimental idiot! He is reduced to such a state of penury that even the bats that infest his house find it a too uncomfortable place.

Grandfather. Why, look at me! I am toiling and slaving night and day for my King, but I have not yet received so much as a brass farthing for my pains.

Third Citizen. Now, what do you think of that?

Grandfather. What should I think? Does any one reward his friends? Go, my friends, and say if you like that our King exists nowhere. That is also a part of our ceremony in celebrating this festival.

IV

[*Turret of the Royal Palace. SUDARSHANA and her friend ROHINI*]

Sudarshana. You may make mistakes, Rohini, but I cannot be mistaken: am I not the Queen? That, of course, must be my King.

Rohini. He who has conferred such high honour upon you cannot be long in showing himself to you.

Sudarshana. His very form makes me restless like a caged bird. Did you try well to ascertain who he is?

Rohini. Yes, I did. Every one I asked said that he was the King.

Sudarshana. What country is he the King of?

Rohini. Our country, King of this land.

Sudarshana. Are you sure that you are speaking of him who has a sunshade made of flowers held over his head?

Rohini. The same: he whose flag has the *Kimshuk* flower painted on it.

Sudarshana. I recognised him at once, of course, but it is you who had your doubts.

Rohini. We are apt to make mistakes, my Queen, and we are afraid to offend you in case we are wrong.

Sudarshana. Would that Surangama were here! There would remain no room for doubt then.

Rohini. Do you think her cleverer than any of us?

Sudarshana. Oh no, but she would recognise him instantly.

Rohini. I cannot believe that she would. She merely pretends to know him. There is none to test her knowledge if she professes to know the King. If we were as shameless as she is, it would not have been difficult for us to boast about our acquaintance with the King.

Sudarshana. But no, she never boasts.

Rohini . It is pure affectation, the whole of it: which often goes a longer way than open boasting. She is up to all manner of tricks: that is why we could never like her.

Sudarshana. But whatever you may say, I should have liked to ask her if she were here.

Rohini. Very well, Queen. I shall bring her here. She must be lucky if she is indispensable for the Queen to know the King.

Sudarshana. Oh no it isn't for that but I would like to hear it said by every one.

Rohini. Is not every one saying it? Why, just listen, the aeclamations of the people mount up even to this height!

Sudarshana. Then do one thing: put these flowers on a lotus leaf, and take them to him.

Rohini. And what am I to say if he asks who sends them?

Sudarshana. You will not have to say anything he will know. He thought that I would not be able to recognise him: I cannot let him off without showing that I have found him out. [*ROHINI goes out with the flowers.*]

Sudarshana. My heart is all a−quiver and restless to−night: I have never felt like this before. The white, silver light of the full moon is flooding the heavens and brimming over on every side like the bubbling foam of wine, . . . It seizes on me like a yearning, like a mantling intoxication. Here, who is here?

[*Enter a SERVANT*]

Servant. What is your pleasure, your Majesty?

Sudarshana. Do you see those festive boys singing and moving through the alleys and avenues of the mango trees? Call them hither, bring them to me: I want to hear them sing. [*SERVANT goes out and enters with the boys.*] Come, living emblems of youthful spring, begin your festive song! All my mind and body is song and music to−night but the ineffable melody escapes my tongue: do you then sing for my sake!

Song.

My sorrow is sweet to me in this spring night.
My pain smites at the chords of my love and softly sings.
Visions take birth from my yearning eyes and flit in the moonlit sky.
The smells from the depths of the woodlands have lost their way in my dreams.
Words come in whispers to my ears, I know not from where,
And bells in my anklets tremble and jingle in time with my heart thrills.

Sudarshana. Enough, enough I cannot bear it any more! Your song has filled my eyes with tears. . . . A fancy comes to me that desire can never attain its object it need never attain it. What sweet hermit of the woods has taught you this song? Oh that my eyes could see him whose song my ears have heard! Oh, how I wish I wish I could wander rapt and lovely in the thick woodland arbours of the heart! Dear boys of the hermitage! how shall I reward you? This necklace is but made of jewels, hard stones its hardness will give you pain I have got nothing like the garlands of flowers you have on. [*The boys bow and go out.*]

[*Enter ROHINI*]

Sudarshana. I have not done well I have not done well, Rohini. I feel ashamed to ask you what happened. I have just realised that no hand can really give the greatest of gifts. Still, let me hear all.

Rohini. When I gave the King those flowers, he did not appear to understand anything.

Sudarshana. You don't say so? He did not understand

Rohini. No; he sat there like a doll, without uttering a single word. I think he did not want to show that he understood nothing, so he just held his tongue.

Sudarshana. Fie on me! My shamelessness has been justly punished. Why did you not bring back my flowers?

Rohini. How could I? The King of Kanchi, a very clever man, who was sitting by him, took in everything at a glance, and he just smiled a bit and said, "Emperor, the Queen Sudarshana sends your Majesty her greetings with these blossoms the blossoms that belong to the God of Love, the friend of Spring." The King seemed to awake with a start, and said, "This is the crown of all my regal glory to−night." I was coming back, all out of countenance, when the King of Kanchi took off this necklace of jewels from the King's person, and said to me, "Friend, the King's garland gives itself up to you, in return for the happy fortune you have brought."

Sudarshana. What, Kanchi had to make the King understand all this! Woe is me, to−night's festival has opened wide for me the doors of ignominy and shame! What else could I expect? Leave me alone, Rohini; I want solitude for a time. [*ROHINI goes out.*] A great blow has shattered my pride to atoms to−day, and yet . . . I cannot efface from my mind that beautiful, fascinating figure! No pride is left me−I am beaten, vanquished, utterly helpless. . . . I cannot even turn away from him. Oh, how the wish comes back to me again and again to ask that garland of Rohini! But what would she think! Rohini!

[*Enter ROHINI*]

Rohini. What is your wish?

Sudarshana. What reward do you deserve for your services to−day?

Rohini. Nothing from you but I had my reward from the King as it should be.

Sudarshana. That is no free gift, but an extortion, of reward. I do not like to see you put on what was given in so indifferent a manner. Take it off I give you my bracelets if you leave it here. Take these bracelets, and go now. [*ROHINI goes out.*] Another defeat! I should have thrown this necklace away, but I could not! It is pricking me as if it were a garland of thorns but I cannot throw it away. This is what the god of the festival has brought me to−night this necklace of ignominy and shame!

V

[*GRANDFATHER near the door of the Pleasure House. A Company of Men*]

Grandfather. Have you had enough of it, friends?

First Man. Oh, more than that, Grandpa. Just see, they have made me red all over. None has escaped.

> [*Author's note:* During the spring festival in India people throw red powder on each other. In this play this red powder has been taken to be the symbol of the passion of love.]

Grandfather. No? Did they throw the red dust on the Kings too?

Second Man. But who could approach them? They were all secure inside the enclosures.

Grandfather. So they have escaped you! Could you not throw the least bit of colour on them? You should have forced your way there.

Third Man. My dear old man, they have a different sort of red specially to themselves. Their eyes are red: the turbans of their guards and retinue are red too. And the latter flourished their swords about so much that a little more nearness on our part would have meant a lavish display of the fundamental red colour.

Grandfather. Well done, friends always keep them at a distance. They are the exiles of the Earth and we have got to keep them so.

Third Man. I am going home, Grandpa; it is past midnight.[*Goes out.*]

[*Enter a BAND of SINGERS, singing.*]

All blacks and whites have lost their distinction
And have become red red as the tinge of your feet.
Red is my bodice and red are my dreams,
My heart sways and trembles like a red lotus.

Grandfather. Excellent, my friends, splendid! So you had a really enjoyable time!

Singers. Oh, grand! Everything was red, red! Only the moon in the sky gave us the slip it remained white.

Grandfather. He only looks so innocent from the outside. If you had only taken off his white disguise, you would have seen his trickery. I have been watching what red colours he is throwing on the Earth to−night. And yet, fancy his remaining white and colourless all the while!

Song.

With you is my game, love, my love!
My heart is mad, it will never own defeat,
Do you think you will escape stainless yourself reddening me with red powder?
Could I not colour your robe with the red pollens of the blossom of my heart?

[*They go out.*]

[*Enter the "KING" and KANCHI.*]

Kanchi. You must do exactly as I have told you. Let there be no mistake of any kind.

"King". There shall be no mistake.

Kanchi. The Queen Sudarshana's mansions are in the . . .

"King". Yes, sire, I have seen the place well.

Kanchi. What you have got to do is to set fire to the garden, and then you will take advantage of the bustle and confusion to accomplish your object straightway.

"King". I shall remember.

Kanchi. Look here, Sir Pretender, I cannot help thinking that a needless fear is troubling us there is really no King in this country.

"King". My sole aim is to rid this country of this anarchy. Your common man cannot live without a King, whether a real one or a fraud! Anarchy is always a source of danger.

Kanchi. Pious benefactor of the people, your wonderful self−sacrifice should really be an example to all of us. I am thinking of doing this extraordinary service to the people myself. [*They go out.*]

VI

Rohini. What is the matter? I cannot make out what is all this! (To the gardeners.) Where are you all going away in such a hurry?

First Gardener. We are going out of the garden.

Rohini. Where?

Second Gardener. We do not know where the King has called us.

Rohini. Why, the King is in the garden. Which King has called you?

First Gardener. We cannot say.

Second Gardener. The King we have been serving all our life, of course.

Rohini. Will you all go?

First Gardener. Yes, all we have to go instantly. Otherwise we might get into trouble. [*They go out.*]

Rohini. I cannot understand their words. . . . I am afraid. They are scampering off like wild animals that fly just before the bank of a river breaks down into the water.

[*Enter KING OF KOSHALA*]

Koshala. Rohini, do you know where your King and Kanchi have gone?

Rohini. They are somewhere in the garden, but I could not tell you where.

Koshala. I cannot really understand their intentions. I have not done well to put my trust in Kanchi. [*Exit.*]

Rohini. What is this dark affair going on amongst these kings? Something dreadful is going to happen soon. Shall I too be drawn into this affair? [*Enter AVANTI*]

Avanti. Rohini, do you know where the other princes are?

Rohini. It is difficult to say which of them is where. The King of Koshala just passed by in this direction.

Avanti. I am not thinking of Koshala. Where are your King and Kanchi?

Rohini. I have not seen them for a long time.

Avanti. Kanchi is always avoiding us. He is certainly planning to deceive us all. I have not done well to put my hand in this imbroglio. Friend, could you kindly tell me any way out of this garden?

Rohini. I have none.

Avanti. Is there no man here who will show me the way out?

Rohini. The servants have all left the garden.

Avanti. Why did they do so?

Rohini. I could not exactly understand what they meant. They said the King had commanded them to leave the garden at once.

Avanti. King? Which King? Rohini They could not say exactly.

Avanti. This does not sound well. I shall have to find a way out at any cost. I cannot stay here a single moment more.[*Goes out hurriedly.*]

Rohini. Where shall I find the King? When I gave him the flowers the Queen had sent, he did not seem much interested in me at the time; but ever since that hour he has been showering gifts and presents on me. This causeless generosity makes me more afraid. . . . Where are the birds flying at such an hour of the night? What has frightened them all on a sudden? This is not the usual time of their flight, certainly, . . . Why is the Queen's pet deer running that way? Chapata! Chapata! She does not even hear my call. I have never seen a night like this! The horizon on every side suddenly becomes red, like a madman's eye! The sun seems to be setting at this untimely hour on all sides at the same time. What madness of the Almighty is this! . . . Oh, I am frightened! . . . Where shall I find the King?

VII

[*At the Door of the QUEEN'S Palace*]

"King". What is this you have done, Kanchi?

Kanchi. I wanted to fire only this part of the garden near the palace. I had no idea that it would spread so

quickly on all sides. Tell me, quick, the way out of this garden.

"King". I can tell you nothing about it. Those who brought us here have all fled away.

VII

Kanchi. You are a native of this country you must know the way.

"King". I have never entered these inner royal gardens before.

Kanchi. I won't hear of it you must show me the way, or I shall split you into halves.

"King". You may take my life by that means, but it would be a very precarious method of finding the way out of this. garden.

Kanchi. Why were you, then, going about saying that you were the King of this country?

"King". I am not the King I am not the King. [*Throwing himself on the ground with folded hands.*] Where art thou, my King? Save me, oh, save me! I am a rebel punish me, but do not kill me!

Kanchi. What is the use of shouting and cringing to the empty air? It is a much better way of spending the time to search for the way.

"King". I shall lie down here I shall not move an inch. Come what will, I shall not complain.

Kanchi. I will not allow all this nonsense. If I am to be burnt to death, you will be my companion to the very end.

From the Outside. Oh, save us, save us, our King! The fire is on all sides of us!

Kanchi. Fool, get up, lose no more time.

Sudarshana. [*entering*] King, O my King! save me, save me from death! I am surrounded by fire.

"King". Who is the King? I am no King.

Sudarshana. You are not the King?

"King". No, I am a hypocrite, I am a scoundrel. [*Flinging his crown on the ground.*] Let my deception and hypocrisy be shattered into dust! [*Goes out with KANCHI.*]

Sudarshana. No King! He is not the King? Then, O thou God of fire, burn me, reduce me to ashes! I shall throw myself into thy hands, O thou great purifier; burn to ashes my shame, my longing, my desire.

Rohini. [*entering*] Queen, where are you going? All your inner chambers are shrouded in raging fire do you not enter there.

Sudarshana. Yes! I will enter those burning chambers! It is the fire of my death! [*Enters the Palace.*]

VIII

[*The Dark Room. The KING and SUDARSRANA*]

King. Do not be afraid you have no cause for fear. The fire will not reach this room.

Sudarshana. I have no fear but oh, shame has accompanied me like a raging fire. My face, my eyes, my heart, every part of my body is being scorched and burnt by its flames.

King. It will be some time before you get over this burning.

Sudarshana. This fire will never cease−will never cease!

King. Do not be despondent, Queen!

Sudarshana. O King, I shall not hide anything from you. . . . I have another's garland round my neck.

King. That garland, too, is mine how else could he get it? He stole it from my room.

Sudarshana. But it is *his* gift to me: yet I could not fling this garland away! When the fire came roaring on all sides of me, I thought of throwing this garland into the fire. But no, I could not. My mind whispered, "Let that garland be on you in your death." . . . What fire is this, O King, into which I, who had come out to see you, leaped like a moth that cannot resist the flame? What a pain is this, oh, what agony! The fire keeps burning as fiercely as ever, but I go on living within its flames!

King. But you have seen me at last your desire has been fulfilled.

Sudarshana. But did I seek to see you in the midst of this fearful doom? I know not what I saw, but my heart is still beating fast with fear.

King. What did you see?

Sudarshana. Terrible, oh, it was terrible! I am afraid even to think of it again. Black, black oh, thou art black like the everlasting night! I only looked on thee for one dreadful instant. The blaze of the fire fell on your features you looked like the awful night when a comet swings fearfully into our ken oh, then I closed my eyes I could not look on you any more. Black as the threatening storm−cloud, black as the shoreless sea with the spectral red tint of twilight on its tumultuous waves!

King. Have I not told you before that one cannot bear my sight unless one is already prepared for me? One would want to run away from me to the ends of the earth. Have I not seen this times without number? That is why I wanted to reveal myself to you slowly and gradually, not all too sudden.

Sudarshana. But sin came and destroyed all your hopes the very possibility of a union with you has now become unthinkable to me.

King. It will be possible in time, my Queen. The utter and bleak blackness that has to−day shaken you to your soul with fear will one day be your solace and salvation. What else can my love exist for?

Sudarshana. It cannot be, it is not possible. What will *your* love only do? *My* love has now turned away from you. Beauty has cast its spell on me this frenzy, this intoxication will never leave me it has dazzled and fired my eyes, it has thrown its golden glamour over my very dreams! I have told you all now punish me

as you like.

King. The punishment has already begun.

Sudarshana. But if you do not cast me off. I will leave you

King. You have the utmost liberty to do as you like.

Sudarshana. I cannot bear your presence! My heart is angry at you. Why did you but what have you done to me? . . . Why are you like this? Why did they tell me you were fair and handsome? Thou art black, black as night I shall never, I can never, like you. I have seen what I love it is soft as cream, delicate as the *shirisha* flower, beautiful as a butterfly.

King. It is false as a mirage, empty as a bubble.

Sudarshana. Let it bc but I cannot stand near you I simply cannot! I must fly away from here. Union with you, it cannot be possible! It cannot be anything but a false union my mind must inevitably turn away from you.

King. Will you not even try a little?

Sudarshana. I have been trying since yesterday but the more I try, the more rebellious does my heart become. If I stay with you I shall constantly be pursued and hounded by the thought that I am impure, that I am false and faithless.

King. Well then, you can go as far from me as you like.

Sudarshana. I cannot fly away from you just because you do not prevent my going. Why do you not hold me back, hold me by the hair, saying, "You shall not go"? Why do you not strike me? Oh, punish me, strike me, beat me with violent hands! But your unresisting silence makes me wild oh, I cannot bear it!

King. How do you think that I am really silent? How do you know that I am not trying to keep you back?

Sudarshana. Oh, no, no ! I cannot bear this tell me aloud, command me with the voice of thunder, compel me with words that will drown everything else in my ears do not let me off so easily, so mildly!

King. I shall leave you free, but why should I let you break away from me?

Sudarshana. You will not let me? Well then, I must go!

King. Go then!

Sudarshana. Then I am not to blame at all. You could have held me back by force, but you did not! You have not hindered me−and now I shall go away. Command your sentinels to prevent my going.

King. No one will stand in your way. You can go as free as the broken storm−cloud driven by the tempest.

Sudarshana. I can resist no more−something in me is impelling me forward I am breaking away from my anchor! Perhaps I shall sink, but I shall return no more.[*She rushes out.*]

[*Enter SURANGAMA, who sings*]

Surangama. What will of thine is this that sends me afar! Again shall I come back at thy feet from all my wanderings. It is thy love that feigns this neglect thy caressing hands are pushing me away to draw me back to thy arms again! O my King, what is this game that thou art playing throughout thy kingdom?

Sudarshana. [*re−entering*] King, O King!

Surangama. He has gone away.

Sudarshana. Gone away? Well then, . . . then he has cast me off for good! I have come back, but he could not wait a single instant for me! Very well, then, I am now perfectly free. Surangama, did he ask you to keep me back?

Surangama. No, he said nothing.

Sudarshana. Why should he say anything? Why should he care for me? . . . I am then free, perfectly free. But, Surangama, I wanted to ask one thing of the King, but could not utter it in his presence. Tell me if he has punished the prisoners with death.

Surangama. Death? My King never punishes with death.

Sudarshana. What has he done to them, then?

Surangama. He has set them at liberty. Kanchi has acknowledged his defeat and gone back to his kingdom.

Sudarshana. Ah, what a relief!

Surangama. My Queen, I have one prayer to make to you.

Sudarshana. You will not have to utter your prayer in words, Surangama. Whatever jewellery and ornaments the King gave me, I leave to you I am not worthy to wear them now.

Surangama. No, I do not want them, my Queen. My master has never given me any ornaments to wear my unadorned plainness is good enough for me. He has not given me anything of which I can boast before people.

Sudarshana. What do you want of me then?

Surangama. I too shall go with you, my Queen.

Sudarshana. Consider what you are saying; you are wanting to leave your master. What a prayer for you to make!

Surangama. I shall not go far from him when you are going out unguarded he will be with you, close by your side.

Sudarshana. You are talking nonsense, my child. I wanted to take Rohini with me, but she would not come. What gives you courage enough to wish to come with me?

Surangama. I have got neither courage nor strength. But I shall go courage will come of itself, and strength too will come.

Sudarshana. No, I cannot take you with me; your presence will constantly remind me of my shame; I shall not be able to endure that.

Surangama. O my Queen, I have made all your good and all your evil my own as well; will you treat me as a stranger still? I must go with you.

IX

[*The KING OF KANYA KUBJA, father of SUDARSHANA, and his MINISTER*]

King of Kanya Kubja. I heard everything before her arrival.

Minister. The princess is waiting alone outside the city gates on the bank of the river. Shall I send people to welcome her home?

King of Kanya Kubja. What! She who has faithlessly left her husband do you propose trumpeting her infamy and shame to every one by getting up a show for her?

Minister. Shall I then make arrangements for her residence at the palace?

King of Kanya Kubja. You will do nothing of the sort. She has left her place as the Empress of her own accord here she will have to work as a maid−servant if she wants to stay in my house.

Minister. It will be hard and bitter to her, Your Highness.

King of Kanya Kubja. If I seek to save her from her sufferings, then I am not worthy to be her father.

Minister. I shall arrange everything as you wish, Your Highness.

King of Kanya Kubja. Let it be kept a secret that she is my daughter; otherwise we shall all be in an awful trouble.

Minister. Why do you fear such disaster, Your Highness?

King of Kanya Kubja. When woman swerves from the right path, then she appears fraught with the direst calamity. You do not know with what deadly fear this daughter of mine has inspired me she is coming to my home laden with peril and danger.

X

[*Inner Apartments of the Palace. SUDARSHANA and SURANGAMA*]

Sudarshana. Go away from me, Surangama! A deadly anger rages within me−I cannot bear anybody it makes me wild to see you so patient and submissive.

Surangama. Whom are you angry with?

Sudarshana. I do not know; but I wish to see everything destroyed and convulsed in ruin and disaster! I left my place on the throne as the Empress in a moment's time. Did I lose my all to sweep the dust, to sweat and slave in this dismal hole? Why do the torches of mourning not flare up for me all over the world? Why does not the earth quake and tremble? Is my fall but the unobserved dropping of the puny bean−flower? Is it not more like the fall of a glowing star, whose fiery blazon bursts the heavens asunder?

Surangama. A mighty forest only smokes and smoulders before it bursts into a conflagration: the time has not come yet.

Sudarshana. I have thrown my queen's honour and glory to the dust and winds but is there no human being who will come out to meet my desolate soul here? Alone oh, I am fearfully, terribly alone!

Surangama. You are not alone.

Sudarshana. Surangama, I shall not keep anything from you. When he set the palace on fire, I could not be angry with him. A great inward joy set my heart a−flutter all the while. What a stupendous crime! What glorious prowess! It was this courage that made me strong and fired my own spirits. It was this terrible joy that enabled me to leave everything behind me in a moment's time. But is it all my imagination only? Why is there no sign of his coming anywhere?

Surangama. He of whom you are thinking did not set fire to the palace−it is the King of Kanchi who did it.

Sudarshana. Coward! But is it possible? So handsome, so bewitching, and yet no manhood in him! Have I deceived myself for the sake of such a worthless creature? O shame! Fie on me! . . . But, Surangama, don't you think that your King should yet have come to take me back? [*SURANGAMA remains silent.*] You think I am anxious to go back? Never! Even if the King really came I should not have returned. Not even once did he forbid me to come away, and I found all the doors wide open to let me out! And the stony and dusty road over which I walked it was nothing to it that a queen was treading on it. It is hard and has no feelings, like your King; the meanest beggar is the same to it as the highest Empress. You are silent! Well, I tell you, your King's behaviour is mean, brutal, shameful!

Surangama. Every one knows that my King is hard and pitiless no one has ever been able to move him.

Sudarshana. Why do you, then, call him day and night?

Surangama. May he ever remain hard and relentless like rock may my tears and prayers never move him! Let my sorrows be ever mine only and may his glory and victory be for ever!

Sudarshana. Surangama, look! A cloud of dust seems to rise over the eastern horizon across the fields.

Surangama. Yes, I see it.

Sudarshana. Is that not like the banner of a chariot?

Surangama. Indeed, a banner it is.

Sudarshana. Then he is coming. He has come at last!

Surangama. Who is coming?

Sudarshana. Our King who else? How could he live without me? It is a wonder how he could hold out even for these days.

Surangama. No, no, this cannot be the King.

Sudarshana. "No," indeed! As if you know everything! Your King is hard, stony, pitiless, isn't he? Let us see how hard he can be. I knew from the beginning that he would come−that he would have to rush after me. But remember, Surangama, I never for a single moment asked him to come. You will see how I make your King confess his defeat to me! Just go out, Surangama, and let me know everything. [*SURANGAMA goes out.*] But shall I go if he comes and asks me to return with him? Certainly not! I will not go! Never!

[*Enter SURANGAMA*]

Surangama. It is not the King, my Queen.

Sudarshana. Not the King? Are you quite sure? What! he has not come yet?

Surangama. No, my King never raises so much dust when he comes. Nobody can know when he comes at all.

Sudarshana. Then this is

Surangama. The same: he is coming with the King of Kanchi.

Sudarshana. Do you know his name?

Surangama. His name is Suvarna.

Sudarshana. It is he, then. I thought, "I am lying here like waste refuse and offal, which no one cares even to touch." But my hero is coming now to release me. Did you know Suvarna?

Surangama. When I was at my father's home, in the gambling den

Sudarshana. No, no, I won't hear anything of him from you. He is my own hero, my only salvation. I shall know him without your telling stories about him. But just see, a nice man your King is! He did not care to come to rescue me from even this degradation. You cannot blame me after this. I could not have waited for him all my life here, toiling ignominiously like a bondslave. I shall never have *your* meekness and submissiveness.

XI

[*Encampment*]

Kanchi. [*To Kanya Kubja's Messenger*.] Tell your King that he need not receive us exactly as his guests. We are on our way back to our kingdoms, but we are waiting to rescue Queen Sudarshana from the servitude and degradation to which she is condemned here.

Messenger. Your Highness, you will remember that the princess is in her father's house.

Kanchi. A daughter may stay in her father's home only so long as she remains unmarried.

Messenger. But her connections with her father's family remain intact still.

Kanchi. She has abjured all such relations now.

Messenger. Such relationship can never be abjured, Your Highness, on this side of death: it may remain in abeyance at times, but can never be wholly broken up.

Kanchi. If the King chooses not to give up his daughter to me on peaceful terms, our *Kshatriya* code of righteousness will oblige me to employ force. You may take this as my last word.

Messenger. Your Highness, do not forget that our King too is bound by the same code. It is idle to expect that he will deliver up his daughter by merely hearing your threats.

Kanchi. Tell your King that I have come prepared for such an answer. [*MESSENGER goes out.*]

Suvarna. King of Kanchi, it seems to me that we are daring too much.

Kanchi. What pleasure would there be in this adventure if it were otherwise?

Suvarna. It does not cost much courage to challenge Kanya Kubja but . . .

Kanchi. If you once begin to be afraid of "but," you will hardly find a place in this world safe enough for you.

[*Enter a SOLDIER*]

Soldier. Your Highness! I have just received the news that the Kings of Koshala, Avanti, and Kalinga are coming this way with their armies. [*Exit.*]

Kanchi. Just what I was afraid of! The report of Sudarshana's flight has spread abroad now we are going to be in for a general scramble which is sure to end in smoke.

Suvarna. It is useless now, Your Highness. These are not good tidings. I am perfectly certain that it is our Emperor himself who has secretly spread the report everywhere.

Kanchi. Why, what good will it bring him?

Suvarna. The greedy ones will tear one another to pieces in the general rivalry and scramble−and he will take advantage of the situation to go back with the booty.

Kanchi. Now it becomes clear why your King never shows himself. His trick is to multiply himself on every side fear makes him visible everywhere. But I will still maintain that your King is but an empty fraud from top to bottom.

Suvarna. But, please Your Highness, will you have the kindness to let me off?

Kanchi. I cannot let you go I have some use for you in this affair.

[*Enter a SOLDIER*]

Soldier. Your Highness, Virat, Panchal, and Vidarbha too have come. They have encamped on the other side of the river.[*Exit.*]

Kanchi. In the beginning we must all fight together. Let the battle with Kanya Kubja first be over, then we shall find some way out of the difficulty.

Suvarna. Please do not drag me into your plans I shall be happy if you leave me alone I am a poor, mean creature nothing can

Kanchi. Look here, king of hypocrites, ways and means are never of a very exalted order roads and stairs and so forth are always to be trodden under our feet. The advantage of utilising men like you in our plans is that we have to make use of no mask or illusion. But if I were to consult my prime minister, it would be absurd for me to call theft by any name less dignified than public benefit. I will go now, and move the princes about like pawns on the chessboard; the game cannot evidently go on if all the chessmen propose moving like kings!

XII

[*Interior of the Palace*]

Sudarshana. Is the fight still going on?

Surangama. As fiercely as ever.

Sudarshana. Before going out to the battle my father came to me and said, "You have come away from one King, but you have drawn seven Kings after you: I have a mind to cut you up into seven pieces and distribute them among the princes. It would have been well if he did so. Surangama!

Surangama. Yes?

Sudarshana. If your King had the power to save me, could my present state have left him unmoved?

Surangama. My Queen, why do you ask me? Have I the power to answer for my King? I know my understanding is dark; that is why I never dare to judge him.

Sudarshana. Who have joined in this fight?

Surangama. All the seven princes.

Sudarshana. No one else?

Surangama. Suvarna attempted to escape in secret before the fight began but Kanchi has kept him a prisoner in his camps.

Sudarshana. Oh, I should have been dead long ago! But, O King, my King, if you had come and helped my father, your fame would have been none the less! It would have become brighter and higher. Are you quite sure, Surangama, that he has not come?

Surangama. I know nothing for certain.

Sudarshana. But since I came here I have felt suddenly many a time as if somebody were playing on a *vina* below my window.

Surangama. There is nothing impossible in the idea that somebody indulges his taste for music there.

Sudarshana. There is a deep thicket below my window I try to find out who it is every time I hear the music, but I can see nothing distinctly.

Surangama. Perhaps some wayfarer rests in the shade and plays on the instrument.

Sudarshana. It may be so, but my old window in the palace comes back to my memory. I used to come after dressing in the evening and stand at my window, and out of the blank darkness of our lampless meeting−place used to stream forth strains and songs and melodies, dancing and vibrating in endless succession and overflowing profusion, like the passionate exuberance of a ceaseless fountain!

Surangama. O deep and sweet darkness! the profound and mystic darkness whose servant I was!

Sudarshana. Why did you come away with me from that room?

Surangama. Because I knew he would follow us and take us back.

Sudarshana. But no, he will not come−he has left us for good. Why should he not?

Surangama. If he can leave us like that, then we have no need of him. Then he does not exist for us: then that dark chamber is totally empty and void no *vina* ever breathed its music there none called you or me in that chamber; then everything has been a delusion and an idle dream.

[*Enter the DOORKEEPER*]

Sudarshana. Who are you?

Doorkeeper. I am the porter of this palace.

Sudarshana. Tell me quickly what you have got to say.

Doorkeeper. Our King has been taken prisoner.

Sudarshana. Prisoner? O Mother Earth! [*Faints.*]

XIII

[*KING OF KANCHI and SUVARNA*]

Suvarna. You say, then, that there will be no more necessity of any fight amongst yourselves?

Kanchi. No, you need not be afraid. I have made all the princes agree that he whom the Queen accepts as her

husband will have her, and the others will have to abandon all further struggle.

Suvarna. But you must have done with me now, Your Highness so I beg to be let off now. Unfit as I am for anything, the fear of impending danger has unnerved me and stunned my intellect. You will therefore find it difficult to put me to any use.

Kanchi. You will have to sit there as my umbrella−holder.

Suvarna. Your servant is ready for anything; but of what profit will that be to you?

Kanchi. My man, I see that your weak intellect cannot go with a high ambition in you. You have no notion yet with what favour the Queen looked upon you. After all, she cannot possibly throw the bridal garland on an umbrella−bearer's neck in a company of princes, and yet, I know, she will not be able to turn her mind away from you. So on all accounts this garland will fall under the shade of my regal umbrella.

Suvarna. Your Highness, you are entertaining dangerous imaginings about me. I pray you, please do not implicate me in the toils of such groundless notions. I beg Your Highness most humbly, pray set me at liberty.

Kanchi. As soon as my object is attained, I shall not keep you one moment from your liberty. Once the end is attained, it is futile to burden oneself with the means.

XIV

[*SUDARSHANA and SURANGAMA at the Window*]

Sudarshana. Must I go to the assembly of the princes, then? Is there no other means of saving father's life?

Surangama. The King of Kanchi has said so.

Sudarshana . Are these the words worthy of a King? Did he say so with his own lips?

Surangama. No, his messenger, Suvarna, brought this news.

Sudarshana. Woe, woe is me!

Surangama. And he produced a few withered flowers and said, "Tell your Queen that the drier and more withered these souvenirs of the Spring Festival become, the fresher and more blooming do they grow within in my heart."

Sudarshana. Stop! Tell me no more. Do not torment me any more.

Surangama. Look! There sit all the princes in the great assembly. He who has no ornament on his person, except a single garland of flowers round his crown he is the King of Kanchi. And he who holds the umbrella over his head, standing behind him that is Suvarna.

Sudarshana. Is that Suvarna? Are you quite certain?

Surangama. Yes, I know him well.

Sudarshana. Can it be that it is this man that I saw the other day? No, no, I saw something mingled and transfused and blended with light and darkness, with wind and perfume, no, no, it cannot be he; that is not he.

Surangama. But every one admits that he is exceedingly beautiful to look at.

Sudarshana. How could *that* beauty fascinate me? Oh, what shall I do to purge my eyes of their pollution?

Surangama. You will have to wash them in that bottomless darkness.

Sudarshana. But tell me, Surangama, why does one make such mistakes?

Surangama. Mistakes are but the preludes to their own destruction.

Messenger. [*entering*] Princess, the Kings are waiting for you in the hall. [*Exit.*]

Sudarshana. Surangama, bring me the veil. [*SURANGAMA goes out.*] O King, my only King! You have left me alone, and you have been but just in doing so. But will you not know the inmost truth within my soul? [*Taking out a dagger from within her bosom.*] This body of mine has received a stain I shall make a sacrifice of it to−day in the dust of the hall, before all these princes! But shall I never be able to tell you that I know of no stain of faithlessness within the hidden chambers of my heart? That dark chamber where you would come to meet me lies cold and empty within my bosom to−day but, O my Lord! none has opened its doors, none has entered it but you, O King! Will you never come again to open those doors? Then, let death come, for it is dark like yourself, and its features are beautiful as yours . It is you it is yourself, O King!

XV

[*The Gathering of the PRINCES*]

Vidarbha. King of Kanchi, how is it that you have not got a single piece of ornament on your person?

Kanchi. Because I entertain no hopes at all, my friend. Ornaments would but double the shame of my defeat.

Kalinga. But your umbrella−bearer seems to have made up for that, he is loaded with gold and jewellery all over.

Virat. The King of Kanchi wants to demonstrate the futility and inferiority of outer beauty and grandeur. Vanity of his prowess has made him discard all outer embellishments from his limbs.

Kosliala. I am quite up to his trickery; he is seeking to prove his own dignity, maintaining a severe plainness among the bejewelled princes.

Panchala. I cannot commend his wisdom in this matter. Every one knows that a woman's eyes are like a moth in that they fling themselves headlong on the glare and glitter of jewel and gold.

Kalinga. But how long shall we have to wait more?

Kanchi. Do not grow impatient, King of Kalinga sweet are the fruits of delay.

Kalinga. If I were sure of the fruit I could have endured it. It is because my hopes of tasting the fruit are extremely precarious that my eagerness to have a sight of her breaks through all bounds.

Kanchi. But you are young still abandoned hope comes back to you again and again like a shameless woman at your age: we, however, have long passed that stage.

Koshala. Kanchi, did you feel as if something shook your seat just now? Is it an earthquake?

Kanchi. Earthquake? I do not know.

Vidarbha. Or perhaps some other prince is coming with his army.

Kalinga. There is nothing against your theory except that we should have first heard the news from some herald or messenger in that case.

Vidarbha. I cannot regard this as a very auspicious omen.

Kanchi. Everything looks inauspicious to the eye of fear.

Vidarbha. I fear none except Fate, before which courage or heroism is as futile as it is absurd.

Panchala. Vidarbha, do not darken to−day's happy proceedings with your unwelcome prognostications.

Kanchi. I never take the unseen into account till it has become "seen."

Vidarbha. But then it might be too late to do anything.

Panchala. Did we not all of us start at a specially auspicious moment?

Vidarbha. Do you think you insure against every possible risk by starting at auspicious moments? It looks as if

Kanchi. You had better let the "as if" alone: though our own creation, it often proves our ruin and destruction.

Kalinga. Isn't that music somewhere outside?

Panchala. Yes, it sounds like music, sure enough.

Kanchi. Then at last it must be the Queen Sudarshana who is approaching near. [*Aside to SUVARNA.*] Suvarna, you must not hide and cower behind me like that. Mind, the umbrella in your hand is shaking!

[*Enter GRANDFATHER, dressed as a warrior*]

Kalinga. Who is that? Who are you?

Panchala. Who is this that dares to enter this hall without being invited?

Virat. Amazing impudence! Kalinga, just prevent the fellow from advancing further.

Kalinga. You are all my superiors in age you are fitter to do that than myself.

Vidarbha. Let us hear what he has to say.

Grandfather. The KING has come.

Vidarbha. [*starting*] King?

Panchala. Which King?

Kalinga. Where does he come from?

Grandfather. My King!

Virat. Your King?

Kalinga. Who is he?

Koshala. What do you mean?

Grandfather. You all know whom I mean. He has come.

Vidarbha. He has come?

Koshala. With what intention?

Grandfather. He has summoned you all to come to him.

Kanchi. Summoned us, indeed? In what terms has he been pleased to summon us?

Grandfather. You can take his call in any way you like there is none to prevent you he is prepared to make all kinds of welcome to suit your various tastes.

Virat. But who are you?

Grandfather. I am one of his generals.

Kanchi. Generals? It is a lie! Do you think of frightening us? Do you imagine that I cannot see through your disguise? We all know you well and you pose as a "general" before us!

Grandfather. You have recognised me to perfection. Who is so unworthy as I to bear my King's commands? And yet it is he who has invested me with these robes of a general and sent me here: he has chosen me before greater generals and mightier warriors.

Kanchi. All right, we shall go to observe the proprieties and amenities on a fitting occasion but at present we are in the midst of a pressing engagement. He will have to wait till this little function is over.

Grandfather. When he sends out his call he does not wait.

Koshala. I shall obey his call; I am going at once.

Vidarbha. Kanchi, I cannot agree with you in your proposal to wait till this function is over. I am going.

Kalinga. You are older than I am I shall follow you.

Panchala. Look behind you, Prince of Kanchi, your regal umbrella is lying in the dust: you have not noticed when your umbrella−holder has stolen away.

Kanchi. All right, general. I too am going but not to do him homage. I go to fight him on the battle−ground.

Grandfather. You will meet my King in the field of battle: that is no mean place for your reception.

Virat. Look here, friends, perhaps we are all flying before an imagined terror it looks as if the King of Kanchi will have the best of it.

Panchala. Possibly, when the fruit is so near the hand, it is cowardly and foolish to go away without plucking it.

Kalinga. It is better to join the King of Kanchi. He cannot be without a definite plan and purpose when he is doing and daring so much.

XVI

[*SUDARSHANA and SURANGAMA*]

Sudarshana. The fight is over now. When will the King come?

Surangama. I do not know myself: I am also looking forward to his coming.

Sudarshana. I feel such a throb of joy, Surangama, that my breast is positively aching. But I am dying with shame too; how shall I show my face to him?

Surangama. Go to him in utmost humility and resignation, and all shame will vanish in a moment.

Sudarshana. I cannot help confessing that I have met with my uttermost defeat for all the rest of my life. But pride made me claim the largest share in his love so long. Every one used to say I had such wonderful beauty, such graces and virtues; every one used to say that the King showed unlimited kindness towards me−this is what makes it difficult for me to bend my heart in humility before him.

Surangama. This difficulty, my Queen, will pass off.

Sudarshana. Oh, yes, it will pass the day has arrived for me to humble myself before the whole world. But why does not the King come to take me back? What more is he waiting for yet?

Surangama. Have I not told you my King is cruel and hard very hard indeed?

Sudarshana. Go out, Surangama, and bring me news of him.

Surangama. I do not know where I should go to get any news of him. I have asked Grandfather to come;

perhaps when he comes we shall hear something from him.

Sudarshana. Alack, my evil fate! I have been reduced to asking others to hear about my own King!

[*Enter GRANDFATHER*]

Sudarshana. I have heard that you are my King's friend, so accept my obeisance and give me your blessings.

Grandfather. What are you doing, Queen? I never accept anybody's obeisance. My relation with every one is only that of comradeship.

Sudarshana. Smile on me, then give me good news. Tell me when the King is coming to take me back.

Grandfather. You ask me a hard question, indeed! I hardly understand yet the ways of my friend. The battle is over, but no one can tell where he is gone.

Sudarshana. Is he gone away, then?

Grandfather. I cannot find any trace of him here.

Sudarshana. Has he gone? And do you call such a person your friend?

Grandfather. That is why he gets people's abuse as well as suspicion. But my King simply does not mind it in the least.

Sudarshana. Has he gone away? Oh, oh, how hard, how cruel, how cruel! He is made of stone, he is hard as adamant! I tried to move him with my own bosom my breast is torn and bleeding but him I could not move an inch! Grandfather, tell me, how can you manage with such a friend?

Grandfather. I have known him now I have known him through my griefs and joys he can make me weep no more now.

Sudarshana. Will he not let me know him also?

Grandfather. Why, he will, of course. Nothing else will satisfy him.

Sudarshana. Very well, I shall see how hard he can be! I shall stay here near the window without saying a word; I shall not move an inch; let me see if he will not come!

Grandfather. You are young still you can afford to wait for him; but to me, an old man, a moment's loss is a week. I must set out to seek him whether I succeed or not.[*Exit.*]

Sudarshana. I do not want him I will not seek him! Surangama, I have no need of your King! Why did he fight with the princes? Was it for me at all? Did he want to show off his prowess and strength? Go away from here I cannot bear your sight. He has humbled me to the dust, and is not satisfied still!

XVII

[*A Band of Citizens*]

First Citizen. When so many Kings met together, we thought we were going to have some big fun; but somehow everything took such a turn that nobody knows what happened at all!

Second Citizen. Did you not see, they could not come to an agreement among themselves? every one distrusted every one else.

Third Citizen. None kept to their original plans; one wanted to advance, another thought it better policy to recede; some went to the right, others made a rush to the left: how can you call that a fight?

First Citizen. They had no eye to real fighting each had his eye on the others.

Second Citizen. Each was thinking, "Why should I die to enable others to reap the harvest?"

Third Citizen. But you must all admit that Kanchi fought like a real hero.

First Citizen. He for a long time after his defeat seemed loth to acknowledge himself beaten.

Second Citizen. He was at last fixed in the chest by a deadly missile.

Third Citizen. But before that he did not seem to realise that he had been losing ground at every step.

First Citizen. As for the other Kings well, nobody knows where they fled, leaving poor Kanchi alone in the field.

Second Citizen. But I have heard that he is not dead yet.

Third Citizen. No, the physicians have saved him but he will carry the mark of his defeat on his breast till his dying day.

First Citizen. None of the other Kings who fled has escaped; they have all been taken prisoners. But what sort of justice is this that was meted out to them?

Second Citizen. I heard that every one was punished except Kanchi, whom the judge placed on his right on the throne of justice, putting a crown on his head.

Third Citizen. This beats all mystery hollow.

Second Citizen. This sort of justice, to speak frankly, strikes us as fantastic and capricious.

First Citizen. Just so. The greatest offender is certainly the King of Kanchi; as for the others, greed of gain now pressed them to advance, now they drew back in fear.

Third Citizen. What kind of justice is this, I ask? It is as if the tiger got scot−free, while his tail got cut off.

Second Citizen. If I were the judge, do you think Kanchi would be whole and sound at this hour? There would be nothing left of him altogether.

Third Citizen. They are great, high justices, my friends; their brains are of a different stamp from ours.

First Citizen. Have they got any brains at all, I wonder? They simply indulge their sweet whims as there are none to say anything to them from above.

Second Citizen. Whatever you may say, if we had the governing power in our hands we should certainly have carried on the government much better than this.

Third Citizen. Can there be any real doubts about that? That of course goes without saying.

XVIII

[*The Street. GRANDFATHER and KANCHI*]

Grandfather. What, Prince of Kanchi, you here!

Kanchi. Your King has sent me on the road.

Grandfather. That is a settled habit with him.

Kanchi. And now, no one can get a glimpse of him.

Grandfather. That too is one of his amusements.

Kanchi. But how long more will he elude me like this? When nothing could make me acknowledge him as my King, he came all of a sudden like a terrific tempest God knows from where and scattered my men and horses and banners in one wild tumult: but now, when I am seeking the ends of the earth to pay him my humble homage, he is nowhere to be seen.

Grandfather. But however big an Emperor he may be, he has to submit to him that yields. But why have you come out at night, Prince?

Kanchi. I still cannot get rid of the feeling of a secret dread of being laughed at by people when they see me meekly doing my homage to your King, acknowledging my defeat.

Grandfather. Such indeed is the people. What would move others to tears only serves to move their empty laughter.

Kanchi. But you too are on the road, Grandfather.

Grandfather. This is my jolly pilgrimage to the land of losing everything.

Sings.

I am waiting with my all in the hope of losing everything.
I am watching at the roadside for him who turns one out into the open road,
Who hides himself and sees, who loves you unknown to you,
I have given my heart in secret love to him,

I am waiting with my all in the hope of losing everything.

XIX

[*A Road. SUDARSHANA and SURANGAMA*]

Sudarshana. What a relief, Surangama, what freedom! It is my defeat that has brought me freedom. Oh, what an iron pride was mine! Nothing could move it or soften it. My darkened mind could not in any way be brought to see the plain truth that it was not the King who was to come, it was I who ought to have gone to him. All through yesternight I lay alone on the dusty floor before that window lay there through the desolate hours and wept! All night the southern winds blew and shrieked and moaned like the pain that was biting at my heart; and all through it I heard the plaintive "Speak, wife!" of the nightbird echoing in the tumult outside! . . . It was the helpless wail of the dark night, Surangama!

Surangama. Last night's heavy and melancholy air seemed to hang on for an eternity oh, what a dismal and gboomy night!

Sudarshana. But would you believe it I seemed to hear the soft strains of the *vina* floating through all that wild din and tumult! Could he play such sweet and tender tunes, he who is so cruel and terrible? The world knows only my indignity and ignominy but none but my own heart could hear those strains that called me through the lone and wailing night. Did you too, Surangama, hear the *vina*? Or was that but a dream of mine?

Surangama. But it is just to hear that same *vina's* music that I am always by your side. It is for this call of music, which I knew would one day come to dissolve all the barriers of love, that I have all along been listening with an cager ear.

Sudarshana. He did at last send me on the open road I could not withstand his will. When I shall find him, the first words that I shall tell him will be, "I have come of my own will I have not awaited your coming." I shall say, "For your sake have I trodden the hard and weary roads, and bitter and ceaseless has been my weeping all the way." I shall at least have this pride in me when I meet him.

Surangama. But even that pride will not last. He came before you did who else could have sent you on the road?

Sudarshana. Perhaps he did. As long as a sense of offended pride remained with me, I could not help thinking that he had left me for good; but when I flung my dignity and pride to the winds and came out on the common streets, then it seemed to me that he too had come out: I have been finding him since the moment I was on the road. I have no misgivings now. All this suffering that I have gone through for his sake, the very bitternesss of all this is giving me his company. Ah! yes, he has come he has held me by the hand, just as he used to do in that chamber of darkness, when, at his touch, all my body would start with a sudden thrill: it is the same, the same touch again! Who says that he is not here? Surangama, can you not see that he has come, in silence and secret? . . . Who is that there? Look, Surangama, there is a third traveller of this dark road at this hour of the night.

Surangama. I see, it is the King of Kanchi, my Queen.

Sudarshana. King of Kanchi!

Surangama. Don't be afraid, my Queen!

Sudarshana. Afraid! Why should I be afraid? The days of fear are gone for ever for me.

Kanchi. [*entering*] Queen−mother, I see you two on this road! I am a traveller of the same path as yourself. Have no fear of me, O Queen!

Sudarshana. It is well, King of Kanchi, that we should be going together, side by side this is but right. I came on your way when I first left my home, and now I meet you again on my way back. Who could have dreamed that this meeting of ours would augur so well?

Kanchi. But, Queen−mother, it is not meet that you should walk over this road on foot. Will you permit me to get a chariot for you?

Sudarshana. Oh, do not say so: I shall never be happy if I could not on my way back home tread on the dust of the road that led me away from my King. I would be deceiving myself if I were now to go in a chariot.

Surangama. King, you too are walking in the dust to−day: this road has never known anybody driving his horse or chariot over it.

Sudarshana. When I was the Queen, I stepped over silver and gold I shall have now to atone for the evil fortune of my birth by walking over dust and bare earth. I could not have dreamed that thus I would meet my King of common earth and dust at every step of mine to−day.

Surangama. Look, my Queen, there on the eastern horizon comes the dawn. We have not long to walk: I see the spires of the golden turrets of the King's palace.

[*Enter GRANDFATHER*]

Grandfather. My child, it is dawn at last!

Sudarshana. Your benedictions have given me Godspeed, and here I am, at last.

Grandfather. But do you see how ill−mannered our King is? He has sent no chariot, no music band, nothing splendid or grand.

Sudarshana. Nothing grand, did you say? Look, the sky is rosy and crimson from end to end, the air is full of the welcome of the scent of flowers.

Grandfather. Yes, but however cruel our King may be, we cannot seek to emulate him: I cannot help feeling pain at seeing you in this state, my child. How can we bear to see you going to the King's palace attired in this poor and wretched attire? Wait a little I am running to fetch you your Queen's garments.

Sudarshana. Oh no, no, no! He has taken away those regal robes from me for ever he has attired me in a servant's dress before the eyes of the whole world: what a relief this has been to me! I am his servant now, no longer his Queen. To−day I stand at the feet of all those who can claim any relationship with him.

Grandfather. But your enemies will laugh at you now: how can you bear their derision?

Sudarshana. Let their laughter and derision be immortal let them throw dust at me in the streets: this dust will to−day be the powder with which I shall deck myself before meeting my lord.

Grandfather. After this, we shall say nothing. Now let us play the last game of our Spring Festival instead of the pollen of flowers let the south breeze blow and scatter dust of lowliness in every direction! We shall go to the lord clad in the common grey of the dust. And we shall find him too covered with dust all over. For do you think the people spare him? Even he cannot escape from their soiled and dusty hands, and he does not even care to brush the dirt off his garments.

Kanchi. Grandfather, do not forget me in this game of yours! I also will have to get this royal garment of mine soiled till it is beyond all recognition.

Grandfather. That will not take long, my brother. Now that you have come down so far you will change your colour in no time. Just look at our Queen she got into a temper with herself and thought that she could spoil her matchless beauty by flinging away all her ornaments: but this insult to her beauty has made it shine forth in tenfold radiance, and now it is in its unadorned perfection. We hear that our King is all innocent of beauty that is why he loves all his manifold beauty of form which shines as the very ornament of his breast. And that beauty has to−day taken off its veil and cloak of pride and vanity! What could I not give to be allowed to hear the wonderful music and song that has filled my King's palace to−day!

Surangama. Lo, there rises the sun!

XX

[*The Dark Chamber*]

Sudarshana. Lord, do not give me back the honour which you once did turn away from me! I am the servant of your feet I only seek the privilege of serving you.

King. Will you be able to bear me now?

Sudarshana. Oh yes, yes, I shall. Your sigh repelled me because I had sought to find you in the pleasure garden, in my Queen's chambers: there even your meanest servant looks handsomer than you. That fever of longing has left my eyes for ever. You are not beautiful, my lord you stand beyond all comparisons!

King. That which can be comparable with me lies within yourself.

Sudarshana. If this be so, then that too is beyond comparison. Your love lives in me you are mirrored in that love, and you see your face reflected in me: nothing of this mine, it is all yours, O lord!

King. I open the doors of this dark room to−day the game is finished here! Come, come with me now, come outside *into the light!*

Sudarshana. Before I go, let me bow at the feet of my lord of darkness, my cruel, my terrible, my peerless one!

THE END

The Post Office

Rabindranath Tagore

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Rabindranath Tagore

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ACT I

[*Madhav's House*]

Madhav. What a state I am in! Before he came, nothing mattered; I felt so free. But now that he has come, goodness knows from where, my heart is filled with his dear self, and my home will be no home to me when he leaves. Doctor, do you think he

Physician. If there's life in his fate, then he will live long. But what the medical scriptures say, it seems

Madhav. Great heavens, what?

Physician. The scriptures have it: "Bile or palsey, cold or gout spring all alike."

Madhav. Oh, get along, don't fling your scriptures at me; you only make me more anxious; tell me what I can do.

Physician [*Taking snuff*] The patient needs the most scrupulous care.

Madhav. That's true; but tell me how.

Physician. I have already mentioned, on no account must he be let out of doors.

Madhav Poor child, it is very hard to keep him indoors all day long.

Physician. What else can you do? The autumn sun and the damp are both very bad for the little fellow for the scriptures have it:

> "In wheezing, swoon or in nervous fret,
> In jaundice or leaden eyes "

Madhav. Never mind the scriptures, please. Eh, then we must shut the poor thing up. Is there no other method?

Physician. None at all: for, "In the wind and in the sun "

Madhav. What will your "in this and in that" do for me now? Why don't you let them alone and come straight to the point? What's to be done then? Your system is very, very hard for the poor boy; and he is so quiet too with all his pain and sickness. It tears my heart to see him wince, as he takes your medicine.

Physician. effect. That's why the sage Chyabana observes: "In medicine as in good advices, the least palatable ones are the truest." Ah, well! I must be trotting now. [*Exit*]

[*Gaffer enters*]

Madhav. Well, I'm jiggered, there's Gaffer now.

Gaffer. Why, why, I won't bite you.

Madhav. No, but you are a devil to send children off their heads.

Gaffer. But you aren't a child, and you've no child in the house; why worry then?

Madhav. Oh, but I have brought a child into the house.

Gaffer. Indeed, how so?

Madhav. You remember how my wife was dying to adopt a child?

Gaffer. Yes, but that's an old story; you didn't like the idea.

Madhav. You know, brother, how hard all this getting money in has been. That somebody else's child would sail in and waste all this money earned with so much trouble Oh, I hated the idea. But this boy clings to my heart in such a queer sort of way

Gaffer. So that's the trouble! and your money goes all for him and feels jolly lucky it does go at all.

Madhav. Formerly, earning was a sort of passion with me; I simply couldn't help working for money. Now, I make money and as I know it is all for this dear boy, earning becomes a joy to me.

Gaffer. Ah, well, and where did you pick him up?

Madhav. He is the son of a man who was a brother to my wife by village ties. He has had no mother since infancy; and now the other day he lost his father as well.

Gaffer. Poor thing: and so he needs me all the more.

Madhav. The doctor says all the organs of his little body are at loggerheads with each other, and there isn't much hope for his life. There is only one way to save him and that is to keep him out of this autumn wind and sun. But you are such a terror! What with this game of yours at your age, too, to get children out of doors!

Gaffer. God bless my soul! So I'm already as bad as autumn wind and sun, eh! But, friend, I know something, too, of the game of keeping them indoors. When my day's work is over I am coming in to make friends with this child of yours. [*Exit*]

[*Amal enters*]

Amal. Uncle, I say, Uncle!

Madhav. Hullo! Is that you, Amal?

Amal. Mayn't I be out of the courtyard at all?

Madhav. No, my dear, no.

Amal. See, there where Auntie grinds lentils in the quirn, the squirrel is sitting with his tail up and with his wee hands he's picking up the broken grains of lentils and crunching them. Can't I run up there?

Madhav. No, my darling, no.

Amal. Wish I were a squirrel! it would be lovely. Uncle, why won't you let me go about?

Madhav. Doctor says it's bad for you to be out.

Amal. How can the doctor know?

Madhav. What a thing to say! The doctor can't know and he reads such huge books!

Amal. Does his book−learning tell him everything?

Madhav. Of course, don't you know!

Amal [*With a sigh*] Ah, I am so stupid! I don't read books.

Madhav. Now, think of it; very, very learned people are all like you; they are never out of doors.

Amal. Aren't they really?

Madhav. No, how can they? Early and late they toil and moil at their books, and they've eyes for nothing else. Now, my little man, you are going to be learned when you grow up; and then you will stay at home and read such big books, and people will notice you and say, "he's a wonder."

Amal. No, no, Uncle; I beg of you by your dear feet I don't want to be learned, I won't.

Madhav. Dear, dear; it would have been my saving if I could have been learned.

Amal. No, I would rather go about and see everything that there is.

Madhav. Listen to that! See! What will you see, what is there so much to see?

Amal. See that far−away hill from our window I often long to go beyond those hills and right away.

Madhav. Oh, you silly! As if there's nothing more to be done but just get up to the top of that hill and away! Eh! You don't talk sense, my boy. Now listen, since that hill stands there upright as a barrier, it means you can't get beyond it. Else, what was the use in heaping up so many large stones to make such a big affair of it, eh!

Amal. Uncle, do you think it is meant to prevent your crossing over? It seems to me because the earth can't speak it raises its hands into the sky and beckons. And those who live far and sit alone by their windows can see the signal. But I suppose the learned people

Madhav. No, they don't have time for that sort of nonsense. They are not crazy like you.

Amal. Do you know, yesterday I met someone quite as crazy as I am.

Madhav. Gracious me, really, how so?

Amal. He had a bamboo staff on his shoulder with a small bundle at the top, and a brass pot in his left hand, and an old pair of shoes on; he was making for those hills straight across that meadow there. I called out to him and asked, "Where are you going?" He answered, "I don't know, anywhere!" I asked again, "Why are you going?" He said, "I'm going out to seek work." Say, Uncle, have you to seek work?

Madhav. Of course I have to. There's many about looking for jobs.

Amal. How lovely! I'll go about, like them too, finding things to do.

Madhav. Suppose you seek and don't find. Then

Amal. Wouldn't that be jolly? Then I should go farther! I watched that man slowly walking on with his pair of worn out shoes. And when he got to where the water flows under the fig tree, he stopped and washed his feet in the stream. Then he took out from his bundle some gram−flour, moistened it with water and began to eat. Then he tied up his bundle and shouldered it again; tucked up his cloth above his knees and crossed the stream. I've asked Auntie to let me go up to the stream, and eat my gram−flour just like him.

Madhav. And what did your Auntie say to that?

Amal. Auntie said, "Get well and then I'll take you over there." Please, Uncle, when shall I get well?

Madhav. It won't be long, dear.

Amal. Really, but then I shall go right away the moment I'm well again.

Madhav. And where will you go?

Amal. Oh, I will walk on, crossing so many streams, wading through water. Everybody will be asleep with

their doors shut in the heat of the day and I will tramp on and on seeking work far, very far.

Madhav. I see! I think you had better be getting well first; then

Amal. But then you won't want me to be learned, will you, Uncle?

Madhav. What would you rather be then?

Amal. I can't think of anything just now; but I'll tell you later on.

Madhav. Very well. But mind you, you aren't to call out and talk to strangers again.

Amal. But I love to talk to strangers!

Madhav. Suppose they had kidnapped you?

Amal. That would have been splendid! But no one ever takes me away. They all want me to stay in here.

Madhav. I am off to my work but, darling, you won't go out, will you?

Amal. No, I won't. But, Uncle, you'll let me be in this room by the roadside.

[*Exit Madhav*]

Dairyman. Curds, curds, good nice curds.

Amal. Curdseller, I say, Curdseller.

Dairyman. Why do you call me? Will you buy some curds?

Amal. How can I buy? I have no money.

Dairyman. What a boy! Why call out then? Ugh! What a waste of time.

Amal. I would go with you if I could.

Dairyman. With me?

Amal. Yes, I seem to feel homesick when I hear you call from far down the road.

Dairyman [*Lowering his yoke−pole*] Whatever are you doing here, my child?

Amal. The doctor says I'm not to be out, so I sit here all day long.

Dairyman. My poor child, whatever has happened to you?

Amal. I can't tell. You see I am not learned, so I don't know what's the matter with me. Say, Dairyman, where do you come from?

Dairyman. From our village.

Amal. Your village? Is it very far?

Dairyman. Our village lies on the river Shamli at the foot of the Panch−mura hills.

Amal. Panch−mura hills! Shamli river! I wonder. I may have seen your village. I can't think when though!

Dairyman. Have you seen it? Been to the foot of those hills?

Amal. Never. But I seem to remember having seen it. Your village is under some very old big trees, just by the side of the red road isn't that so?

Dairyman. That's right, child.

Amal. And on the slope of the hill cattle grazing.

Dairyman. How wonderful! Aren't there cattle grazing in our village! Indeed, there are!

Amal. And your women with red sarees fill their pitchers from the river and carry them on their heads.

Dairyman. Good, that's right. Women from our dairy village do come and draw their water from the river; but then it isn't everyone who has a red saree to put on. But, my dear child, surely you must have been there for a walk some time.

Amal. Really, Dairyman, never been there at all. But the first day doctor lets me go out, you are going to take me to your village.

Dairyman. I will, my child, with pleasure.

Amal. And you'll teach me to cry curds and shoulder the yoke like you and walk the long, long road?

Dairyman. Dear, dear, did you ever? Why should you sell curds? No, you will read big books and be learned.

Amal. No, I never want to be learned I'll be like you and take my curds from the village by the red road near the old banyan tree, and I will hawk it from cottage to cottage. Oh, how do you cry "Curd, curd, good nice curd!" Teach me the tune, will you?

Dairyman. Dear, dear, teach you the tune; what an idea!

Amal. Please do. I love to hear it. I can't tell you how queer I feel when I hear you cry out from the bend of that road, through the line of those trees! Do you know I feel like that when I hear the shrill cry of kites from almost the end of the sky?

Dairyman. Dear child, will you have some curds? Yes, do.

Amal. But I have no money.

Dairyman. No, no, no, don't talk of money! You'll make me so happy if you have a little curds from me.

Amal. Say, have I kept you too long?

Dairyman. Not a bit; it has been no loss to me at all; you have taught me how to be happy selling curds. [*Exit*]

Amal [*Intoning*] Curds, curds, good nice curds from the dairy village from the country of the Panch−mura hills by the Shamli bank. Curds, good curds; in the early morning the women make the cows stand in a row under the trees and milk them, and in the evening they turn the milk into curds. Curds, good curds. Hello, there's the watchman on his rounds. Watchman, I say, come and have a word with me.

Watchman. What's all this row you are making? Aren't you afraid of the likes of me?

Amal. No, why should I be?

Watchman. Suppose I march you off then?

Amal. Where will you take me to? Is it very far, right beyond the hills?

Watchman. Suppose I march you straight to the King?

Amal. To the King! Do, will you? But the doctor won't let me go out. No one can ever take me away. I've got to stay here all day long.

Watchman. Doctor won't let you, poor fellow! So I see! Your face is pale and there are dark rings round your eyes. Your veins stick out from your poor thin hands.

Amal. Won't you sound the gong, Watchman?

Watchman. Time has not yet come.

Amal. How curious! Some say time has not yet come, and some say time has gone by! But surely your time will come the moment you strike the gong!

Watchman. That's not possible; I strike up the gong only when it is time.

Amal. Yes, I love to hear your gong. When it is midday and our meal is over, Uncle goes off to his work and Auntie falls asleep reading her Râmayana, and in the courtyard under the shadow of the wall our doggie sleeps with his nose in his curled up tail; then your gong strikes out, "Dong, dong, dong!" Tell me why does your gong sound?

Watchman. My gong sounds to tell the people, Time waits for none, but goes on forever.

Amal. Where, to what land?

Watchman. That none knows.

Amal. Then I suppose no one has ever been there! Oh, I do wish to fly with the time to that land of which no one knows anything.

Watchman. All of us have to get there one day, my child.

Amal. Have I too?

Watchman. Yes, you too!

Amal. But doctor won't let me out.

Watchman. One day the doctor himself may take you there by the hand.

Amal. He won't; you don't know him. He only keeps me in.

Watchman. One greater than he comes and lets us free.

Amal. When will this great doctor come for me? I can't stick in here any more.

Watchman. Shouldn't talk like that, my child.

Amal. No. I am here where they have left me I never move a bit. But when your gong goes off, dong, dong, dong, it goes to my heart. Say, Watchman?

Watchman. Yes, my dear.

Amal. Say, what's going on there in that big house on the other side, where there is a flag flying high up and the people are always going in and out?

Watchman. Oh, there? That's our new Post Office.

Amal. Post Office? Whose?

Watchman. Whose? Why, the King's surely!

Amal. Do letters come from the King to his office here?

Watchman. Of course. One fine day there may be a letter for you in there.

Amal. A letter for me? But I am only a little boy.

Watchman. The King sends tiny notes to little boys.

Amal. Oh, how lovely! When shall I have my letter? How do you guess he'll write to me?

Watchman. Otherwise why should he set his Post Office here right in front of your open window, with the golden flag flying?

Amal. But who will fetch me my King's letter when it comes?

Watchman. The King has many postmen. Don't you see them run about with round gilt badges on their chests?

Amal. Well, where do they go?

Watchman. Oh, from door to door, all through the country.

Amal. I'll be the King's postman when I grow up.

Watchman. Ha! ha! Postman, indeed! Rain or shine, rich or poor, from house to house delivering letters that's very great work!

Amal. That's what I'd like best. What makes you smile so? Oh, yes, your work is great too. When it is silent everywhere in the heat of the noonday, your gong sounds, Dong, dong, dong, and sometimes when I wake up at night all of a sudden and find our lamp blown out, I can hear through the darkness your gong slowly sounding, Dong, dong, dong!

Watchman. There's the village headman! I must be off. If he catches me gossiping with you there'll be a great to do.

Amal. The headman? Whereabouts is he?

Watchman. Right down the road there; see that huge palm−leaf umbrella hopping along? That's him!

Amal. I suppose the King's made him our headman here?

Watchman. Made him? Oh, no! A fussy busy−body! He knows so many ways of making himself unpleasant that everybody is afraid of him. It's just a game for the likes of him, making trouble for everybody. I must be off now! Mustn't keep work waiting, you know! I'll drop in again to−morrow morning and tell you all the news of the town. [*Exit*]

Amal. It would be splendid to have a letter from the King every day. I'll read them at the window. But, oh! I can't read writing. Who'll read them out to me, I wonder! Auntie reads her Râmayana; she may know the King's writing. If no one will, then I must keep them carefully and read them when I'm grown up. But if the postman can't find me? Headman, Mr. Headman, may I have a word with you?

Headman. Who is yelling after me on the highway? Oh, you wretched monkey!

Amal. You're the headman. Everybody minds you.

Headman [*Looking pleased*] Yes, oh yes, they do! They must!

Amal. Do the King's postmen listen to you?

Headman. They've got to. By Jove, I'd like to see

Amal. Will you tell the postman it's Amal who sits by the window here?

Headman. What's the good of that?

Amal. In case there's a letter for me.

Headman. A letter for you! Whoever's going to write to you?

Amal. If the King does.

Headman. Ha! ha! What an uncommon little fellow you are! Ha! ha! the King indeed, aren't you his bosom friend, eh! You haven't met for a long while and the King is pining, I am sure. Wait till to−morrow and you'll have your letter.

Amal. Say, Headman, why do you speak to me in that tone of voice? Are you cross?

Headman. Upon my word! Cross, indeed! You write to the King! Madhav is devilish swell nowadays. He'd made a little pile; and so kings and padishahs are everyday talk with his people. Let me find him once and I'll make him dance. Oh, you snipper−snapper! I'll get the King's letter sent to your house indeed I will!

Amal. No, no, please don't trouble yourself about it.

Headman. And why not, pray! I'll tell the King about you and he won't be very long. One of his footmen will come along presently for news of you. Madhav's impudence staggers me. If the King hears of this, that'll take some of his nonsense out of him. [*Exit*]

Amal. Who are you walking there? How your anklets tinkle! Do stop a while, dear, won't you?

[*A Girl enters*]

Girl. I haven't a moment to spare; it is already late!

Amal. I see, you don't wish to stop; I don't care to stay on here either.

Girl. You make me think of some late star of the morning! Whatever's the matter with you?

Amal. I don't know; the doctor won't let me out.

Girl. Ah me! Don't then! Should listen to the doctor. People'll be cross with you if you're naughty. I know, always looking out and watching must make you feel tired. Let me close the window a bit for you.

Amal. No, don't, only this one's open! All the others are shut. But will you tell me who you are? Don't seem to know you.

Girl. I am Sudha.

Amal. What Sudha?

Sudha. Don't you know? Daughter of the flower−seller here.

Amal. What do *you* do?

Sudha. I gather flowers in my basket.

Amal. Oh, flower gathering! That is why your feet seem so glad and your anklets jingle so merrily as you walk. Wish I could be out too. Then I would pick some flowers for you from the very topmost branches right out of sight.

Sudha. Would you really? Do you know more about flowers than I?

Amal. Yes, I *do*, quite as much. I know all about Champa of the fairy tale and his seven brothers. If only they let me, I'll go right into the dense forest where you can't find your way. And where the honey−sipping hummingbird rocks himself on the end of the thinnest branch, I will flower out as a champa. Would you be my sister Parul?

Sudha. You are silly! How can I be sister Parul when I am Sudha and my mother is Sasi, the flower−seller? I have to weave so many garlands a day. It would be jolly if I could lounge here like you!

Amal. What would you do then, all the day long?

Sudha. I could have great times with my doll Benay the bride, and Meni the pussycat and but I say it is getting late and I mustn't stop, or I won't find a single flower.

Amal. Oh, wait a little longer; I do like it so!

Sudha. Ah, well now don't you be naughty. Be good and sit still and on my way back home with the flowers I'll come and talk with you.

Amal. And you'll let me have a flower then?

Sudha. No, how can I? It has to be paid for.

Amal. I'll pay when I grow up before I leave to look for work out on the other side of that stream there.

Sudha. Very well, then.

Amal. And you'll come back when you have your flowers?

Sudha. I will.

Amal. You will, really?

Sudha. Yes, I will.

Amal. You won't forget me? I am Amal, remember that.

Sudha. I won't forget you, you'll see. [*Exit*]

[*A Troop of Boys enter*]

Amal. Say, brothers, where are you all off to? Stop here a little.

Boys. We're off to play.

Amal. What will you play at, brothers?

Boys. We'll play at being ploughmen.

First Boy [*Showing a stick*] This is our ploughshare.

Second Boy. We two are the pair of oxen.

Amal. And you're going to play the whole day?

Boys. Yes, all day long.

Amal. And you'll come back home in the evening by the road along the river bank?

Boys. Yes.

Amal. Do you pass our house on your way home?

Boys. You come out to play with us, yes do.

Amal. Doctor won't let me out.

Boys. Doctor! Suppose the likes of you mind the doctor. Let's be off; it is getting late.

Amal. Don't. Why not play on the road near this window? I could watch you then.

Third Boy. What can we play at here?

Amal. With all these toys of mine lying about. Here you are, have them. I can't play alone. They are getting dirty and are of no use to me.

Boys. How jolly! What fine toys! Look, here's a ship. There's old mother Jatai; say, chaps, ain't he a gorgeous sepoy? And you'll let us have them all? You don't really mind?

Amal. No, not a bit; have them by all means.

Boys. You don't want them back?

Amal. Oh, no, I shan't want them.

Boys. Say, won't you get a scolding for this?

Amal. No one will scold me. But will you play with them in front of our door for a while every morning? I'll get you new ones when these are old.

Boys. Oh, yes, we will. Say, chaps, put these sepoys into a line. We'll play at war; where can we get a musket? Oh, look here, this bit of reed will do nicely. Say, but you're off to sleep already.

Amal. I'm afraid I'm sleepy. I don't know, I feel like it at times. I have been sitting a long while and I'm tired; my back aches.

Boys It's only early noon now. How is it you're sleepy? Listen! The gong's sounding the first watch.

Amal. Yes, dong, dong, dong, it tolls me to sleep.

Boys We had better go then. We'll come in again to−morrow morning.

Amal. I want to ask you something before you go. You are always out do you know of the King's postmen?

Boys Yes, quite well.

Amal. Who are they? Tell me their names.

Boys One's Badal, another's Sarat. There's so many of them.

Amal. Do you think they will know me if there's a letter for me?

Boys Surely, if your name's on the letter they will find you out.

Amal. When you call in to−morrow morning, will you bring one of them along so that he'll know me?

Boys Yes, if you like.

CURTAIN

ACT II

[*Amal in Bed*]

Amal. Can't I go near the window to−day, Uncle? Would the doctor mind that too?

Madhav. Yes, darling, you see you've made yourself worse squatting there day after day.

Amal. Oh, no, I don't know if it's made me more ill, but I always feel well when I'm there.

Madhav. No, you don't; you squat there and make friends with the whole lot of people round here, old and young, as if they are holding a fair right under my eaves flesh and blood won't stand that strain. Just see your face is quite pale.

Amal. Uncle, I fear my fakir'll pass and not see me by the window.

Madhav. Your fakir, whoever's that?

Amal. He comes and chats to me of the many lands where he's been. I love to hear him.

Madhav. How's that? I don't know of any fakirs.

Amal. This is about the time he comes in. I beg of you, by your dear feet, ask him in for a moment to talk to me here.

[*Gaffer Enters in a Fakir's Guise*]

Amal. There you are. Come here, Fakir, by my bedside.

Madhav. Upon my word, but this is

Gaffer [*Winking hard*] I am the fakir.

Madhav. It beats my reckoning what you're not.

Amal. Where have you been this time, Fakir?

Fakir To the Isle of Parrots. I am just back.

Madhav. The Parrots' Isle!

Fakir. Is it so very astonishing? Am I like you, man? A journey doesn't cost a thing. I tramp just where I like.

Amal [*Clapping*] How jolly for you! Remember your promise to take me with you as your follower when I'm well.

Fakir. Of course, and I'll teach you such secrets too of travelling that nothing in sea or forest or mountain can bar your way.

Madhav. What's all this rigmarole?

Gaffer. Amal, my dear, I bow to nothing in sea or mountain; but if the doctor joins in with this uncle of yours, then I with all my magic must own myself beaten.

Amal. No. Uncle shan't tell the doctor. And I promise to lie quiet; but the day I am well, off I go with the Fakir and nothing in sea or mountain or torrent shall stand in my way.

Madhav. Fie, dear child, don't keep on harping upon going! It makes me so sad to hear you talk so.

Amal. Tell me, Fakir, what the Parrots' Isle is like.

Gaffer. It's a land of wonders; it's a haunt of birds. There's no man; and they neither speak nor walk, they simply sing and they fly.

Amal. How glorious! And it's by some sea?

Gaffer. Of course. It's on the sea.

Amal. And green hills are there?

Gaffer. Indeed, they live among the green hills; and in the time of the sunset when there is a red glow on the hillside, all the birds with their green wings flock back to their nests.

Amal. And there are waterfalls!

Gaffer. Dear me, of course; you don't have a hill without its waterfalls. Oh, it's like molten diamonds; and, my dear, what dances they have! Don't they make the pebbles sing as they rush over them to the sea. No devil of a doctor can stop them for a moment. The birds looked upon me as nothing but a man, quite a trifling creature without wings and they would have nothing to do with me. Were it not so I would build a small cabin for myself among their crowd of nests and pass my days counting the sea waves.

Amal. How I wish I were a bird! Then

Gaffer. But that would have been a bit of a job; I hear you've fixed up with the dairyman to be a hawker of curds when you grow up; I'm afraid such business won't flourish among birds; you might land yourself into serious loss.

Madhav. Really this is too much. Between you two I shall turn crazy. Now, I'm off.

Amal. Has the dairyman been, Uncle?

Madhav. And why shouldn't he? He won't bother his head running errands for your pet fakir, in and out among the nests in his Parrots' Isle. But he has left a jar of curd for you saying that he is rather busy with his niece's wedding in the village, and he has got to order a band at Kamlipara.

Amal. But he is going to marry me to his little niece.

Gaffer. Dear me, we are in a fix now.

Amal. He said she would find me a lovely little bride with a pair of pearl drops in her ears and dressed in a lovely red *sâree;* and in the morning she would milk with her own hands the black cow and feed me with warm milk with foam on it from a brand new earthen cruse; and in the evenings she would carry the lamp round the cow−house, and then come and sit by me to tell me tales of Champa and his six brothers.

Gaffer. How delicious! The prospect tempts even me, a hermit! But never mind, dear, about this wedding. Let it be. I tell you when you wed there'll be no lack of nieces in his household.

Madhav. Shut up! This is more than I can stand. [*Exit*]

Amal. Fakir, now that Uncle's off, just tell me, has the King sent me a letter to the Post Office?

Gaffer. I gather that his letter has already started; but it's still on the way.

Amal. On the way? Where is it? Is it on that road winding through the trees which you can follow to the end of the forest when the sky is quite clear after rain?

Gaffer. That's so. You know all about it already.

Amal. I do, everything.

Gaffer. So I see, but how?

Amal. I can't say; but it's quite clear to me. I fancy I've seen it often in days long gone by. How long ago I can't tell. Do you know when? I can see it all: there, the King's postman coming down the hillside alone, a lantern in his left hand and on his back a bag of letters climbing down for ever so long, for days and nights, and where at the foot of the mountain the waterfall becomes a stream he takes to the footpath on the bank and walks on through the rye; then comes the sugarcane field and he disappears into the narrow lane cutting through the tall stems of sugarcanes; then he reaches the open meadow where the cricket chirps and where there is not a single man to be seen, only the snipe wagging their tails and poking at the mud with their bills. I can feel him coming nearer and nearer and my heart becomes glad.

Gaffer. My eyes aren't young; but you make me see all the same.

Amal. Say, Fakir, do you know the King who has this Post Office?

Gaffer. I do; I go to him for my alms every day.

Amal. Good! When I get well, I must have my alms too from him, mayn't I?

Gaffer. You won't need to ask, my dear, he'll give it to you of his own accord.

Amal. No, I would go to his gate and cry, "Victory to thee, O King!" and dancing to the tabor's sound, ask for

alms. Won't it be nice?

Gaffer. It would be splendid, and if you're with me, I shall have my full share. But what'll you ask?

Amal. I shall say, "Make me your postman, that I may go about lantern in hand, delivering your letters from door to door. Don't let me stay at home all day!"

Gaffer. What is there to be sad for, my child, even were you to stay at home?

Amal. It isn't sad. When they shut me in here first I felt the day was so long. Since the King's Post Office I like it more and more being indoors, and as I think I shall get a letter one day, I feel quite happy and then I don't mind being quiet and alone. I wonder if I shall make out what'll be in the King's letter?

Gaffer. Even if you didn't wouldn't it be enough if it just bore your name?

[*Madhav enters*]

Madhav. Have you any idea of the trouble you've got me into, between you two?

Gaffer. What's the matter?

Madhav. I hear you've let it get rumored about that the King has planted his office here to send messages to both of you.

Gaffer. Well, what about it?

Madhav. Our headman Panchanan has had it told to the King anonymously.

Gaffer. Aren't we aware that everything reaches the King's ears?

Madhav. Then why don't you look out? Why take the King's name in vain? You'll bring me to ruin if you do.

Amal. Say, Fakir, will the King be cross?

Gaffer. Cross, nonsense! And with a child like you and a fakir such as I am. Let's see if the King be angry, and then won't I give him a piece of my mind.

Amal. Say, Fakir, I've been feeling a sort of darkness coming over my eyes since the morning. Everything seems like a dream. I long to be quiet. I don't feel like talking at all. Won't the King's letter come? Suppose this room melts away all on a sudden, suppose

Gaffer [*Fanning Amal*] The letter's sure to come to−day, my boy.

[*Doctor enters*]

Doctor And how do you feel to−day?

Amal. Feel awfully well to−day, Doctor. All pain seems to have left me.

Doctor [*Aside to Madhav*] Don't quite like the look of that smile. Bad sign that, his feeling well! Chakradhan has observed

Madhav. For goodness sake, Doctor, leave Chakradhan alone. Tell me what's going to happen?

Doctor. Can't hold him in much longer, I fear! I warned you before This looks like a fresh exposure.

Madhav. No, I've used the utmost care, never let him out of doors; and the windows have been shut almost all the time.

Doctor. There's a peculiar quality in the air to−day. As I came in I found a fearful draught through your front door. That's most hurtful. Better lock it at once. Would it matter if this kept your visitors off for two or three days? If someone happens to call unexpectedly there's the back door. You had better shut this window as well, it's letting in the sunset rays only to keep the patient awake.

Madhav. Amal has shut his eyes. I expect he is sleeping. His face tells me Oh, Doctor, I bring in a child who is a stranger and love him as my own, and now I suppose I must lose him!

Doctor. What's that? There's your headman sailing in! What a bother! I must be going, brother. You had better stir about and see to the doors being properly fastened. I will send on a strong dose directly I get home. Try it on him it may save him at last, if he can be saved at all. [*Exeunt Madhav and Doctor.*]

[*The Headman enters*]

Headman. Hello, urchin!

Gaffer [*Rising hastily*] 'Sh, be quiet.

Amal. No, Fakir, did you think I was asleep? I wasn't. I can hear everything; yes, and voices far away. I feel that mother and father are sitting by my pillow and speaking to me.

[*Madhav enters*]

Headman. I say, Madhav, I hear you hobnob with bigwigs nowadays.

Madhav. Spare me your jests, Headman, we are but common people.

Headman. But your child here is expecting a letter from the King.

Madhav. Don't you take any notice of him, a mere foolish boy!

Headman. Indeed, why not! It'll beat the King hard to find a better family! Don't you see why the King plants his new Post Office right before your win− dow? Why there's a letter for you from the King, urchin.

Amal [*Starting up*] Indeed, really!

Headman. How can it be false? You're the King's chum. Here's your letter [*showing a blank slip of paper*]. Ha, ha, ha! This is the letter.

Amal. Please don't mock me. Say, Fakir, is it so?

Gaffer. Yes, my dear. I as Fakir tell you it is his letter.

Amal. How is it I can't see? It all looks so blank to me. What is there in the letter, Mr. Headman?

Headman. The King says, "I am calling on you shortly; you had better arrange puffed rice offerings for me. Palace fare is quite tasteless to me now." Ha! ha! ha!

Madhav [*With folded palms*] I beseech you, headman, don't you joke about these things

Gaffer. Cutting jokes indeed, dare he!

Madhav. Are you out of your mind too, Gaffer?

Gaffer. Out of my mind, well then I am; I can read plainly that the King writes he will come himself to see Amal, with the state physician.

Amal. Fakir, Fakir, 'sh, his trumpet! Can't you hear?

Headman. Ha! ha! ha! I fear he won't until he's a bit more off his head.

Amal. Mr. Headman, I thought you were cross with me and didn't love me. I never could think you would fetch me the King's letter. Let me wipe the dust off your feet.

Headman. This little child does have an instinct of reverence. Though a little silly, he has a good heart.

Amal. It's hard on the fourth watch now, I suppose Hark the gong, "Dong, dong, ding," "Dong, dong, ding." Is the evening star up? How is it I can't see

Gaffer. Oh, the windows are all shut, I'll open them.

[*A knocking outside*]

Madhav. What's that? Who is it what a bother!

Voice [*From outside*] Open the door.

Madhav Say, Headman Hope they're not robbers.

Headman Who's there? It's Panchanan, the headman, calls Aren't you afraid of the like of me? Fancy! The noise has ceased! Panchanan's voice carries far. Yes, show me the biggest robbers!

Madhav [*Peering out of the window*] I should think the noise has ceased. they've smashed the door.

[*The King's Herald enters*]

Herald. Our Sovereign King comes to−night!

Headman. My God!

Amal. At what hour of the night, Herald?

Herald. On the second watch.

Amal. When from the city gates my friend the watchman will strike his gong, "ding dong ding, ding dong ding" then?

Herald. Yes, then. The King sends his greatest physician to attend on his young friend.

[*State Physician enters*]

State Physician. What's this? How close it is here! Open wide all the doors and windows. [*Feeling Amal's body*] How do you feel, my child?

Amal. I feel very well, Doctor, very well. All pain is gone. How fresh and open! I can see all the stars now twinkling from the other side of the dark.

Physician. Will you feel well enough to leave your bed with the King when he comes in the middle watches of the night?

Amal. Of course, I'm dying to be about for ever so long. I'll ask the King to find me the polar star. I must have seen it often, but I don't know exactly which it is.

Physician. He will tell you everything. [*To Madhav*] Will you go about and arrange flowers through the room for the King's visit? [*Indicating the Headman*] We can't have that person in here.

Amal. No, let him be, Doctor. He is a friend. It was he who brought me the King's letter.

Physician. Very well, my child. He may remain if he is a friend of yours.

Madhav [*Whispering into Amal's ear*] My child, the King loves you. He is coming himself. Beg for a gift from him. You know our humble circumstances.

Amal. Don't you worry, Uncle. I've made up my mind about it.

Madhav. What is it, my child?

Amal. I shall ask him to make me one of his postmen that I may wander far and wide, delivering his message from door to door.

Madhav [*Slapping his forehead*] Alas, is that all?

Amal. What'll be our offerings to the King, Uncle, when he comes?

Herald. He has commanded puffed rice.

Amal. Puffed rice! Say, Headman, you're right. You said so. You knew all we didn't.

Headman. If you send word to my house then I could manage for the King's advent really nice

Physician. No need at all. Now be quiet all of you. Sleep is coming over him. I'll sit by his pillow; he's dropping into slumber. Blow out the oil−lamp. Only let the star−light stream in. Hush, he slumbers.

Madhav [*Addressing Gaffer*] What are you standing there for like a statue, folding your palms. I am nervous. Say, are they good omens? Why are they darkening the room? How will star−light help?

Gaffer. Silence, unbeliever.

[*Sudha enters*]

Sudha. Amal!

Physician. He's asleep.

Sudha. I have some flowers for him. Mayn't I give them into his own hand?

Physician. Yes, you may.

Sudha. When will he be awake?

Physician. Directly the King comes and calls him.

Sudha. Will you whisper a word for me in his ear?

Physician. What shall I say?

Sudha. Tell him Sudha has not forgotten him.

CURTAIN

Chitra, a Play in One Act

Rabindranath Tagore

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Chitra, a Play in One Act

Rabindranath Tagore

Scanned and edited by Elliot S. Wheeler, wheelere@acm.org

TO

MRS. WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY

PREFACE

THIS lyrical drama was written about twenty−five years ago. It is based on the following story from the Mahabharata.

In the course of his wanderings, in fulfilment of a vow of penance, Arjuna came to Manipur. There he saw Chitrangada, the beautiful daughter of Chitravahana, the king of the country. Smitten with her charms, he asked the king for the hand of his daughter in marriage. Chitravahana asked him who he was, and learning that he was Arjuna the Pandara, told him that Prabhanjana, one of his ancestors in the kingly line of Manipur, had long been childless. In order to obtain an heir, he performed severe penances. Pleased with these austerities, the god Shiva gave him this boon, that he and his successors should each have one child. It so happened that the promised child had invariably been a son. He, Chitravahana, was the first to have only a daughter Chitrangada to perpetuate the race. He had, therefore, always treated her as a son and had made her his heir.

Continuing, the king said:

"The one son that will be born to her must be the perpetuator of my race. That son will be the price that I shall demand for this marriage. You can take her, if you like, on this condition."

Arjuna promised and took Chitrangada to wife, and lived in her father's capital for three years. When a son was born to them, he embraced her with affection, and taking leave of her and her father, set out again on his travels.

THE CHARACTERS

GODS: MADANA (Eros). VASANTA (Lycoris).

MORTALS: CHITRA, daughter of the King of Manipur. ARJUNA, a prince of the house of the Kurus. He is of the Kshatriya or "warrior caste," and during the action is living as a Hermit retired in the forest.

VILLAGERS from an outlying district of Manipur.

NOTE. The dramatic poem "Chitra" has been performed in India without scenery the actors being surrounded by the audience. Proposals for its production here having been made to him, he went through this translation and provided stage directions, but wished these omitted if it were printed as a book.

SCENE I

Chitra

ART thou the god with the five darts, the Lord of Love?

Madana

I am he who was the first born in the heart of the Creator. I bind in bonds of pain and bliss the lives of men and women!

Chitra

I know, I know what that pain is and those bonds. And who art thou, my lord?

Vasanta

I am his friend Vasanta the King of the Seasons. Death and decrepitude would wear the world to the bone but that I follow them and constantly attack them. I am Eternal Youth.

Chitra

I bow to thee, Lord Vasanta.

Madana

But what stern vow is thine, fair stranger? Why dost thou wither thy fresh youth with penance and mortification? Such a sacrifice is not fit for the worship of love. Who art thou and what is thy prayer?

Chitra

I am Chitra, the daughter of the kingly house of Manipur. With godlike grace Lord Shiva promised to my royal grandsire an unbroken line of male descent. Nevertheless, the divine word proved powerless to change the spark of life in my mother's womb so invincible was my nature, woman though I be.

Madana

I know, that is why thy father brings thee up as his son. He has taught thee the use of the bow and all the duties of a king.

Chitra

Yes, that is why I am dressed in man's attire and have left the seclusion of a woman's chamber. I know no feminine wiles for winning hearts. My hands are strong to bend the bow, but I have never learnt Cupid's archery, the play of eyes.

Madana

That requires no schooling, fair one. The eye does its work untaught, and he knows how well, who is struck in the heart.

Chitra

One day in search of game I roved alone to the forest on the bank of the Purna river. Tying my horse to a tree trunk I entered a dense thicket on the track of a deer. I found a narrow sinuous path meandering through the dusk of the entangled boughs, the foliage vibrated with the chirping of crickets, when of a sudden I came upon a man lying on a bed of dried leaves, across my path. I asked him haughtily to move aside, but he heeded not. Then with the sharp end of my bow I pricked him in contempt. Instantly he leapt up with straight, tall limbs, like a sudden tongue of fire from a heap of ashes. An amused smile flickered round the corners of his mouth, perhaps at the sight of my boyish countenance. Then for the first time in my life I felt myself a woman, and knew that a man was before me.

Madana

At the auspicious hour I teach the man and the woman this supreme lesson to know themselves. What happened after that?

Chitra

With fear and wonder I asked him "Who are you?" "I am Arjuna," he said, "of the great Kuru clan." I stood petrified like a statue, and forgot to do him obeisance. Was this indeed Arjuna, the one great idol of my dreams! Yes, I had long ago heard how he had vowed a twelve−years' celibacy. Many a day my young ambition had spurred me on to break my lance with him, to challenge him in disguise to single combat, and prove my skill in arms against him. Ah, foolish heart, whither fled thy presumption? Could I but exchange my youth with all its aspirations for the clod of earth under his feet, I should deem it a most precious grace. I know not in what whirlpool of thought I was lost, when suddenly I saw him vanish through the trees. O foolish woman, neither didst thou greet him, nor speak a word, nor beg forgiveness, but stoodest like a barbarian boor while he contemptuously walked away! . . . Next morning I laid aside my man's clothing. I donned bracelets, anklets, waist−chain, and a gown of purple red silk. The unaccustomed dress clung about my shrinking shame; but I hastened on my quest, and found Arjuna in the forest temple of Shiva.

Madana

Tell me the story to the end. I am the heart−born god, and I understand the mystery of these impulses.

Chitra

Only vaguely can I remember what things I said, and what answer I got. Do not ask me to tell you all. Shame fell on me like a thunderbolt, yet could not break me to pieces, so utterly hard, so like a man am I. His last words as I walked home pricked my ears like red hot needles. "I have taken the vow of celibacy. I am not fit to be thy husband!" Oh, the vow of a man! Surely thou knowest, thou god of love, that unnumbered saints and sages have surrendered the merits of their life−long penance at the feet of a woman. I broke my bow in two and burnt my arrows in the fire. I hated my strong, lithe arm, scored by drawing the bowstring. O Love, god Love, thou hast laid low in the dust the vain pride of my manlike strength; and all my man's training lies crushed under thy feet. Now teach me thy lessons; give me the power of the weak and the weapon of the unarmed hand.

Madana

I will be thy friend. I will bring the world−conquering Arjuna a captive before thee, to accept his rebellion's sentence at thy hand.

Chitra

Had I but the time needed, I could win his heart by slow degrees, and ask no help of the gods. I would stand by his side as a comrade, drive the fierce horses of his war−chariot, attend him in the pleasures of the chase, keep guard at night at the entrance of his tent, and help him in all the great duties of a Kshatriya, rescuing the weak, and meting out justice where it is due. Surely at last the day would have come for him to look at me and wonder, "What boy is this? Has one of my slaves in a former life followed me like my good deeds into this?" I am not the woman who nourishes her despair in lonely silence, feeding it with nightly tears and covering it with the daily patient smile, a widow from her birth. The flower of my desire shall never drop into the dust before it has ripened to fruit. But it is the labour of a life time to make one's true self known and honoured. Therefore I have come to thy door, thou world−vanquishing Love, and thou, Vasanta, youthful Lord of the Seasons, take from my young body this primal injustice, an unattractive plainness. For a single day make me superbly beautiful, even as beautiful as was the sudden blooming of love in my heart. Give me but one brief day of perfect beauty, and I will answer for the days that follow.

Madana

Lady, I grant thy prayer.

Vasanta

Not for the short span of a day, but for one whole year the charm of spring blossoms shall nestle round thy limbs.

SCENE II

Arjuna

WAS I dreaming or was what I saw by the lake truly there? Sitting on the mossy turf, I mused over bygone years in the sloping shadows of the evening, when slowly there came out from the folding darkness of foliage an apparition of beauty in the perfect form of a woman, and stood on a white slab of stone at the water's brink. It seemed that the heart of the earth must heave in joy under her bare white feet. Methought the vague veilings of her body should melt in ecstasy into air as the golden mist of dawn melts from off the snowy peak of the eastern hill. She bowed herself above the shining mirror of the lake and saw the reflection of her face. She started up in awe and stood still; then smiled, and with a careless sweep of her left arm unloosed her hair

and let it trail on the earth at her feet. She bared her bosom and looked at her arms, so flawlessly modelled, and instinct with an exquisite caress. Bending her head she saw the sweet blossoming of her youth and the tender bloom and blush of her skin. She beamed with a glad surprise. So, if the white lotus bud on opening her eyes in the morning were to arch her neck and see her shadow in the water, would she wonder at herself the livelong day. But a moment after the smile passed from her face and a shade of sadness crept into her eyes. She bound up her tresses, drew her veil over her arms, and sighing slowly, walked away like a beauteous evening fading into the night. To me the supreme fulfilment of desire seemed to have been revealed in a flash and then to have vanished. . . . But who is it that pushes the door?

Enter CHITRA, dressed as a woman.

Ah! it is she. Quiet, my heart! . . . Fear me not, lady! I am a Kshatriya.

Chitra

Honoured sir, you are my guest. I live in this temple. I know not in what way I can show you hospitality.

Arjuna

Fair lady, the very sight of you is indeed the highest hospitality. If you will not take it amiss I would ask you a question.

Chitra

You have permission.

Arjuna

What stern vow keeps you immured in this solitary temple, depriving all mortals of a vision of so much loveliness?

Chitra

I harbour a secret desire in my heart, for the fulfilment of which I offer daily prayers to Lord Shiva.

Arjuna

Alas, what can you desire, you who are the desire of the whole world! From the easternmost hill on whose summit the morning sun first prints his fiery foot to the end of the sunset land have I travelled. I have seen whatever is most precious, beautiful and great on the earth. My knowledge shall be yours, only say for what or for whom you seek.

Chitra

He whom I seek is known to all.

Arjuna

Indeed! Who may this favourite of the gods be, whose fame has captured your heart?

Chitra

Sprung from the highest of all royal houses, the greatest of all heroes is he.

Arjuna

Lady, offer not such wealth of beauty as is yours on the altar of false reputation. Spurious fame spreads from tongue to tongue like the fog of the early dawn before the sun rises. Tell me who in the highest of kingly lines is the supreme hero?

Chitra

Hermit, you are jealous of other men's fame. Do you not know that all over the world the royal house of the Kurus is the most famous?

Arjuna

The house of the Kurus!

Chitra

And have you never heard of the greatest name of that far−famed house?

Arjuna

From your own lips let me hear it.

Chitra

Arjuna, the conqueror of the world. I have culled from the mouths of the multitude that imperishable name and hidden it with care in my maiden heart. Hermit, why do you look perturbed? Has that name only a deceitful glitter? Say so, and I will not hesitate to break this casket of my heart and throw the false gem to the dust.

Arjuna

Be his name and fame, his bravery and prowess false or true, for mercy's sake do not banish him from your heart for he kneels at your feet even now.

Chitra

You, Arjuna!

Arjuna

Yes, I am he, the love−hungered guest at your door.

Chitra

Then it is not true that Arjuna has taken a vow of chastity for twelve long years?

Arjuna

But you have dissolved my vow even as the moon dissolves the night's vow of obscurity.

Chitra

Oh, shame upon you! What have you seen in me that makes you false to yourself? Whom do you seek in these dark eyes, in these milk−white arms, if you are ready to pay for her the price of your probity? Not my true self, I know. Surely this cannot be love, this is not man's highest homage to woman! Alas, that this frail disguise, the body, should make one blind to the light of the deathless spirit! Yes, now indeed, I know, Arjuna, the fame of your heroic manhood is false.

Arjuna

Ah, I feel how vain is fame, the pride of prowess! Everything seems to me a dream. You alone are perfect; you are the wealth of the world, the end of all poverty, the goal of all efforts, the one woman! Others there are who can be but slowly known. While to see you for a moment is to see perfect completeness once and for ever.

Chitra

Alas, it is not I, not I, Arjuna! It is the deceit of a god. Go, go, my hero, go. Woo not falsehood, offer not your great heart to an illusion. Go.

SCENE III

Chitra

No, impossible. To face that fervent gaze that almost grasps you like clutching hands of the hungry spirit within; to feel his heart struggling to break its bounds urging its passionate cry through the entire body and then to send him away like a beggar no, impossible.

Enter MADANA and VASANTA.

Ah, god of love, what fearful flame is this with which thou hast enveloped me! I burn, and I burn whatever I touch.

Madana

I desire to know what happened last night.

Chitra

At evening I lay down on a grassy bed strewn with the petals of spring flowers, and recollected the wonderful praise of my beauty I had heard from Arjuna; drinking drop by drop the honey that I had stored during the long day. The history of my past life like that of my former existences was forgotten. I felt like a flower, which has but a few fleeting hours to listen to all the humming flatteries and whispered murmurs of the woodlands and then must lower its eyes from the Sky, bend its head and at a breath give itself up to the dust without a cry, thus ending the short story of a perfect moment that has neither past nor future.

Vasanta

A limitless life of glory can bloom and spend itself in a morning.

Madana

Like an endless meaning in the narrow span of a song.

Chitra

The southern breeze caressed me to sleep. From the flowering Malati bower overhead silent kisses dropped over my body. On my hair, my breast, my feet, each flower chose a bed to die on. I slept. And, suddenly in the depth of my sleep, I felt as if some intense eager look, like tapering fingers of flame, touched my slumbering body. I started up and saw the Hermit standing before me. The moon had moved to the west, peering through the leaves to espy this wonder of divine art wrought in a fragile human frame. The air was heavy with perfume; the silence of the night was vocal with the chirping of crickets; the reflections of the trees hung motionless in the lake; and with his staff in his hand he stood, tall and straight and still, like a forest tree. It seemed to me that I had, on opening my eyes, died to all realities of life and undergone a dream birth into a shadow land. Shame slipped to my feet like loosened clothes. I heard his call "Beloved, my most beloved!" And all my forgotten lives united as one and responded to it. I said, "Take me, take all I am!" And I stretched out my arms to him. The moon set behind the trees. One curtain of darkness covered all. Heaven and earth, time and space, pleasure and pain, death and life merged together in an unbearable ecstasy. . . . With the first gleam of light, the first twitter of birds, I rose up and sat leaning on my left arm. He lay asleep with a vague smile about his lips like the crescent moon in the morning. The rosy red glow of the dawn fell upon his noble forehead. I sighed and stood up. I drew together the leafy lianas to screen the streaming sun from his face. I looked about me and saw the same old earth. I remembered what I used to be, and ran and ran like a deer afraid of her own shadow, through the forest path strewn with shephali flowers. I found a lonely nook, and sitting down covered my face with both hands, and tried to weep and cry. But no tears came to my eyes.

Madana

Alas, thou daughter of mortals! I stole from the divine Storehouse the fragrant wine of heaven, filled with it one earthly night to the brim, and placed it in thy hand to drink yet still I hear this cry of anguish!

Chitra [bitterly]

Who drank it? The rarest completion of life's desire, the first union of love was proffered to me, but was wrested from my grasp? This borrowed beauty, this falsehood that enwraps me, will slip from me taking with it the only monument of that sweet union, as the petals fall from an overblown flower; and the woman ashamed of her naked poverty will sit weeping day and night. Lord Love, this cursed appearance companions me like a demon robbing me of all the prizes of love all the kisses for which my heart is athirst.

Madana

Alas, how vain thy single night had been! The barque of joy came in sight, but the waves would not let it touch the shore.

Chitra

Heaven came so close to my hand that I forgot for a moment that it had not reached me. But when I woke in the morning from my dream I found that my body had become my own rival. It is my hateful task to deck her every day, to send her to my beloved and see her caressed by him. O god, take back thy boon!

Madana

But if I take it from you how can you stand before your lover? To snatch away the cup from his lips when he has scarcely drained his first draught of pleasure, would not that be cruel? With what resentful anger he must regard thee then?

Chitra

That would be better far than this. I will reveal my true self to him, a nobler thing than this disguise. If he rejects it, if he spurns me and breaks my heart, I will bear even that in silence.

Vasanta

Listen to my advice. When with the advent of autumn the flowering season is over then comes the triumph of fruitage. A time will come of itself when the heat−cloyed bloom of the body will droop and Arjuna will gladly accept the abiding fruitful truth in thee. O child, go back to thy mad festival.

SCENE IV

Chitra

WHY do you watch me like that, my warrior?

Arjuna

I watch how you weave that garland. Skill and grace, the twin brother and sister, are dancing playfully on your finger tips. I am watching and thinking.

Chitra

What are you thinking, sir?

Arjuna

I am thinking that you, with this same lightness of touch and sweetness, are weaving my days of exile into an immortal wreath, to crown me when I return home.

Chitra

Home! But this love is not for a home!

Arjuna

Not for a home?

Chitra

No. Never talk of that. Take to your home what is abiding and strong. Leave the little wild flower where it was born; leave it beautifully to die at the day's end among all fading blossoms and decaying leaves. Do not take it to your palace hall to fling it on the stony floor which knows no pity for things that fade and are

forgotten.

Arjuna

Is ours that kind of love?

Chitra

Yes, no other! Why regret it? That which was meant for idle days should never outlive them. Joy turns into pain when the door by which it should depart is shut against it. Take it and keep it as long as it lasts. Let not the satiety of your evening claim more than the desire of your morning could earn. . . . The day is done. Put this garland on. I am tired. Take me in your arms, my love. Let all vain bickerings of discontent die away at the sweet meeting of our lips.

Arjuna

Hush! Listen, my beloved, the sound of prayer bells from the distant village temple steals upon the evening air across the silent trees!

SCENE V

Vasanta

I CANNOT keep pace with thee, my friend! I am tired. It is a hard task to keep alive the fire thou hast kindled. Sleep overtakes me, the fan drops from my hand, and cold ashes cover the glow of the fire. I start up again from my slumber and with all my might rescue the weary flame. But this can go on no longer.

Madana

I know, thou art as fickle as a child. Ever restless is thy play in heaven and on earth. Things that thou for days buildest up with endless detail thou dost shatter in a moment without regret. But this work of ours is nearly finished. Pleasure−winged days fly fast, and the year, almost at its end, swoons in rapturous bliss.

SCENE VI

Arjuna

I WOKE in the morning and found that my dreams had distilled a gem. I have no casket to inclose it, no king's crown whereon to fix it, no chain from which to hang it, and yet have not the heart to throw it away. My Kshatriya's right arm, idly occupied in holding it, forgets its duties.

Enter CHITRA.

Chitra

Tell me your thoughts, sir!

Arjuna

My mind is busy with thoughts of hunting today. See, how the rain pours in torrents and fiercely beats upon the hillside. The dark shadow of the clouds hangs heavily over the forest, and the swollen stream, like reckless youth, overleaps all barriers with mocking laughter. On such rainy days we five brothers would go to the Chitraka forest to chase wild beasts. Those were glad times. Our hearts danced to the drumbeat of rumbling clouds. The woods resounded with the screams of peacocks. Timid deer could not hear our approaching steps for the patter of rain and the noise of waterfalls; the leopards would leave their tracks on the wet earth, betraying their lairs. Our sport over, we dared each other to swim across turbulent streams on our way back home. The restless spirit is on me. I long to go hunting.

Chitra

First run down the quarry you are now following. Are you quite certain that the enchanted deer you pursue must needs be caught? No, not yet. Like a dream the wild creature eludes you when it seems most nearly yours. Look how the wind is chased by the mad rain that discharges a thousand arrows after it. Yet it goes free and unconquered. Our sport is like that, my love! You give chase to the fleet−footed spirit of beauty, aiming at her every dart you have in your hands. Yet this magic deer runs ever free and untouched.

Arjuna

My love, have you no home where kind hearts are waiting for your return? A home which you once made sweet with your gentle service and whose light went out when you left it for this wilderness?

Chitra

Why these questions? Are the hours of unthinking pleasure over? Do you not know that I am no more than what you see before you? For me there is no vista beyond. The dew that hangs on the tip of a Kinsuka petal has neither name nor destination. It offers no answer to any question. She whom you love is like that perfect bead of dew.

Arjuna

Has she no tie with the world? Can she be merely like a fragment of heaven dropped on the earth through the carelessness of a wanton god?

Chitra

Yes.

Arjuna

Ah, that is why I always seem about to lose you. My heart is unsatisfied, my mind knows no peace. Come closer to me, unattainable one! Surrender yourself to the bonds of name and home and parentage. Let my heart feel you on all sides and live with you in the peaceful security of love.

Chitra

Why this vain effort to catch and keep the tints of the clouds, the dance of the waves, the smell of the flowers?

Arjuna

Mistress mine, do not hope to pacify love with airy nothings. Give me something to clasp, something that can last longer than pleasure, that can endure even through suffering.

Chitra

Hero mine, the year is not yet full, and you are tired already! Now I know that it is Heaven's blessing that has made the flower's term of life short. Could this body of mine have drooped and died with the flowers of last spring it surely would have died with honour. Yet, its days are numbered, my love. Spare it not, press it dry of honey, for fear your beggar's heart come back to it again and again with unsated desire, like a thirsty bee when summer blossoms lie dead in the dust.

SCENE VII

Madana

TONIGHT is thy last night.

Vasanta

The loveliness of your body will return tomorrow to the inexhaustible stores of the spring. The ruddy tint of thy lips freed from the memory of Arjuna's kisses, will bud anew as a pair of fresh asoka leaves, and the soft, white glow of thy skin will be born again in a hundred fragrant jasmine flowers.

Chitra

O gods, grant me this my prayer! Tonight, in its last hour let my beauty flash its brightest, like the final flicker of a dying flame.

Madana

Thou shalt have thy wish.

SCENE VIII

Villagers

WHO will protect us now?

Arjuna

Why, by what danger are you threatened?

Villagers

The robbers are pouring from the northern hills like a mountain flood to devastate our village.

Arjuna

Have you in this kingdom no warden?

Villagers

Princess Chitra was the terror of all evil doers. While she was in this happy land we feared natural deaths, but had no other fears. Now she has gone on a pilgrimage, and none knows where to find her.

Arjuna

Is the warden of this country a woman?

Villagers

Yes, she is our father and mother in one.

[Exeunt.

Enter CHITRA.

Chitra

Why are you sitting all alone?

Arjuna

I am trying to imagine what kind of woman Princess Chitra may be. I hear so many stories of her from all sorts of men.

Chitra

Ah, but she is not beautiful. She has no such lovely eyes as mine, dark as death. She can pierce any target she will, but not our hero's heart.

Arjuna

They say that in valour she is a man, and a woman in tenderness.

Chitra

That, indeed, is her greatest misfortune. When a woman is merely a woman; when she winds herself round and round men's hearts with her smiles and sobs and services and caressing endearments; then she is happy. Of what use to her are learning and great achievements? Could you have seen her only yesterday in the court of the Lord Shiva's temple by the forest path, you would have passed by without deigning to look at her. But have you grown so weary of woman's beauty that you seek in her for a man's strength?

With green leaves wet from the spray of the foaming waterfall, I have made our noonday bed in a cavern dark as night. There the cool of the soft green mosses thick on the black and dripping stone, kisses your eyes to sleep. Let me guide you thither.

Arjuna

Not today, beloved.

Chitra

Why not today?

Arjuna

I have heard that a horde of robbers has neared the plains. Needs must I go and prepare my weapons to protect the frightened villagers.

Chitra

You need have no fear for them. Before she started on her pilgrimage, Princess Chitra had set strong guards at all the frontier passes.

Arjuna

Yet permit me for a short while to set about a Kshatriya's work. With new glory will I ennoble this idle arm, and make of it a pillow more worthy of your head.

Chitra

What if I refuse to let you go, if I keep you entwined in my arms? Would you rudely snatch yourself free and leave me? Go then! But you must know that the liana, once broken in two, never joins again. Go, if your thirst is quenched. But, if not, then remember that the goddess of pleasure is fickle, and waits for no man. Sit for a while, my lord! Tell me what uneasy thoughts tease you. Who occupied your mind today? Is it Chitra?

Arjuna

Yes, it is Chitra. I wonder in fulfilment of what vow she has gone on her pilgrimage. Of what could she stand in need?

Chitra

Her needs? Why, what has she ever had, the unfortunate creature? Her very qualities are as prison walls, shutting her woman's heart in a bare cell. She is obscured, she is unfulfilled. Her womanly love must content itself dressed in rags; beauty is denied her. She is like the spirit of a cheerless morning, sitting upon the stony mountain peak, all her light blotted out by dark clouds. Do not ask me of her life. It will never sound sweet to man's ear.

Arjuna

I am eager to learn all about her. I am like a traveller come to a strange city at midnight. Domes and towers and garden−trees look vague and shadowy, and the dull moan of the sea comes fitfully through the silence of sleep. Wistfully he waits for the morning to reveal to him all the strange wonders. Oh, tell me her story.

Chitra

What more is there to tell?

Arjuna

I seem to see her, in my mind's eye, riding on a white horse, proudly holding the reins in her left hand, and in her right a bow, and like the Goddess of Victory dispensing glad hope all round her. Like a watchful lioness she protects the litter at her dugs with a fierce love. Woman's arms, though adorned with naught but unfettered strength, are beautiful! My heart is restless, fair one, like a serpent reviving from his long winter's sleep. Come, let us both race on swift horses side by side, like twin orbs of light sweeping through space. Out from this slumbrous prison of green gloom, this dank, dense cover of perfumed intoxication, choking breath.

Chitra

Arjuna, tell me true, if, now at once, by some magic I could shake myself free from this voluptuous softness, this timid bloom of beauty shrinking from the rude and healthy touch of the world, and fling it from my body like borrowed clothes, would you be able to bear it? If I stand up straight and strong with the strength of a daring heart spurning the wiles and arts of twining weakness, if I hold my head high like a tall young mountain fir, no longer trailing in the dust like a liana, shall I then appeal to man's eye? No, no, you could not endure it. It is better that I should keep spread about me all the dainty playthings of fugitive youth, and wait for you in patience. When it pleases you to return, I will smilingly pour out for you the wine of pleasure in the cup of this beauteous body. When you are tired and satiated with this wine, you can go to work or play; and when I grow old I will accept humbly and gratefully whatever corner is left for me. Would it please your heroic soul if the playmate of the night aspired to be the helpmeet of the day, if the left arm learnt to share the burden of the proud right arm?

Arjuna

I never seem to know you aright. You seem to me like a goddess hidden within a golden image. I cannot touch you, I cannot pay you my dues in return for your priceless gifts. Thus my love is incomplete. Sometimes in the enigmatic depth of your sad look, in your playful words mocking at their own meaning, I gain glimpses of a being trying to rend asunder the languorous grace of her body, to emerge in a chaste fire of pain through a vaporous veil of smiles. Illusion is the first appearance of Truth. She advances towards her lover in disguise. But a time comes when she throws off her ornaments and veils and stands clothed in naked dignity. I grope for that ultimate you, that bare simplicity of truth.

Why these tears, my love? Why cover your face with your hands? Have I pained you, my darling? Forget what I said. I will be content with the present. Let each separate moment of beauty come to me like a bird of mystery from its unseen nest in the dark bearing a message of music. Let me for ever sit with my hope on the brink of its realization, and thus end my days.

SCENE IX

CHITRA and ARJUNA

Chitra [cloaked]

My lord, has the cup been drained to the last drop? Is this, indeed, the end? No, when all is done something still remains, and that is my last sacrifice at your feet.

I brought from the garden of heaven flowers of incomparable beauty with which to worship you, god of my heart. If the rites are over, if the flowers have faded, let me throw them out of the temple [unveiling in her original male attire]. Now, look at your worshipper with gracious eyes.

I am not beautifully perfect as the flowers with which I worshipped. I have many flaws and blemishes. I am a

traveller in the great world−path, my garments are dirty, and my feet are bleeding with thorns. Where should I achieve flower−beauty, the unsullied loveliness of a moment's life? The gift that I proudly bring you is the heart of a woman. Here have all pains and joys gathered, the hopes and fears and shames of a daughter of the dust; here love springs up struggling toward immortal life. Herein lies an imperfection which yet is noble and grand. If the flower−service is finished, my master, accept this as your servant for the days to come!

I am Chitra, the king's daughter. Perhaps you will remember the day when a woman came to you in the temple of Shiva, her body loaded with ornaments and finery. That shameless woman came to court you as though she were a man. You rejected her; you did well. My lord, I am that woman. She was my disguise. Then by the boon of gods I obtained for a year the most radiant form that a mortal ever wore, and wearied my hero's heart with the burden of that deceit. Most surely I am not that woman.

I am Chitra. No goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self. If your babe, whom I am nourishing in my womb be born a son, I shall myself teach him to be a second Arjuna, and send him to you when the time comes, and then at last you will truly know me. Today I can only offer you Chitra, the daughter of a king.

Arjuna

Beloved, my life is full.

Fruit−Gathering

Rabindranath Tagore

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Fruit−Gathering

Rabindranath Tagore

I

BID me and I shall gather my fruits to bring them in full baskets into your courtyard, though some are lost and some not ripe.

For the season grows heavy with its fulness, and there is a plaintive shepherd's pipe in the shade.

Bid me and I shall set sail on the river.

The March wind is fretful, fretting the languid waves into murmurs.

The garden has yielded its all, and in the weary hour of evening the call comes from your house on the shore in the sunset.

II

MY life when young was like a flower a flower that loosens a petal or two from her abundance and never feels the loss when the spring breeze comes to beg at her door.

Now at the end of youth my life is like a fruit, having nothing to spare, and waiting to offer herself completely with her full burden of sweetness.

III

Is summer's festival only for fresh blossoms and not also for withered leaves and faded flowers?

Is the song of the sea in tune only with the rising waves?

Does it not also sing with the waves that fall?

Jewels are woven into the carpet where stands my king, but there are patient clods waiting to be touched by his feet.

Few are the wise and the great who sit by my Master, but he has taken the foolish in his arms and made me his servant for ever.

IV

I WOKE and found his letter with the morning.

I do not know what it says, for I cannot read.

I shall leave the wise man alone with his books, I shall not trouble him, for who knows if he can read what the letter says.

Let me hold it to my forehead and press it to my heart.

When the night grows still and stars come out one by one I will spread it on my lap and stay silent.

The rustling leaves will read it aloud to me, the rushing stream will chant it, and the seven wise stars will sing

it to me from the sky.

I cannot find what I seek, I cannot understand what I would learn; but this unread letter has lightened my burdens and turned my thoughts into songs.

V

A HANDFUL of dust could hide your signal when I did not know its meaning.

Now that I am wiser I read it in all that hid it before.

It is painted in petals of flowers; waves flash it from their foam; hills hold it high on their summits.

I had my face turned from you, therefore I read the letters awry and knew not their meaning.

VI

WHERE roads are made I lose my way.

In the wide water, in the blue sky there is no line of a track.

The pathway is hidden by the birds' wings, by the star−fires, by the flowers of the wayfaring seasons.

And I ask my heart if its blood carries the wisdom of the unseen way.

VII

ALAS, I cannot stay in the house, and home has become no home to me, for the eternal Stranger calls, he is going along the road.

The sound of his footfall knocks at my breast; it pains me!

The wind is up, the sea is moaning. I leave all my cares and doubts to follow the homeless tide, for the Stranger calls me, he is going along the road.

VIII

BE ready to launch forth, my heart! and let those linger who must.

For your name has been called in the morning sky.

Wait for none!

The desire of the bud is for the night and dew, but the blown flower cries for the freedom of light.

Burst your sheath, my heart, and come forth!

IX

WHEN I lingered among my hoarded treasure I felt like a worm that feeds in the dark upon the fruit where it was born.

I leave this prison of decay.

I care not to haunt the mouldy stillness, for I go in search of everlasting youth; I throw away all that is not one with my life nor as light as my laughter.

I run through time and, O my heart, in your chariot dances the poet who sings while he wanders.

X

You took my hand and drew me to your side, made me sit on the high seat before all men, till I became timid, unable to stir and walk my own way; doubting and debating at every step lest I should tread upon any thorn of their disfavour.

I am freed at last!

The blow has come, the drum of insult sounded, my seat is laid low in the dust.

My paths are open before me.

My wings are full of the desire of the sky.

I go to join the shooting stars of midnight, to plunge into the profound shadow.

I am like the storm−driven cloud of summer that, having cast off its crown of gold, hangs as a sword the thunderbolt upon a chain of lightning.

In desperate joy I run upon the dusty path of the despised; I draw near to your final welcome.

The child finds its mother when it leaves her womb.

When I am parted from you, thrown out from your household, I am free to see your face.

XI

IT decks me only to mock me, this jewelled chain of mine.

It bruises me when on my neck, it strangles me when I struggle to tear it off.

It grips my throat, it chokes my singing.

Could I but offer it to your hand, my Lord, I would be saved.

Take it from me, and in exchange bind me to you with a garland, for I am ashamed to stand before you with this jewelled chain on my neck.

XII

FAR below flowed the Jumna, swift and clear, above frowned the jutting bank.

Hills dark with the woods and scarred with the torrents were gathered around.

Govinda, the great Sikh teacher, sat on the rock reading scriptures, when Raghunath, his disciple, proud of his wealth, caine and bowed to him and said, "I have brought my poor present unworthy of your acceptance."

Thus saying he displayed before the teacher a pair of gold bangles wrought with costly stones.

The master took up one of them, twirling it round his finger, and the diamonds darted shafts of light.

Suddenly it slipped from his hand and rolled down the bank into the water.

"Alas," screamed Raghunath, and jumped into the stream.

The teacher set his eyes upon his book, and the water held and hid what it stole and went its way.

The daylight faded when Raghunath came back to the teacher tired and dripping.

He panted and said, "I can still get it back if you show me where it fell."

The teacher took up the remaining bangle and throwing it into the water said, "It is there."

XIII

To move is to meet you every moment,
    Fellow−traveller!

It is to sing to the falling of your feet.

He whom your breath touches does not glide by the shelter of the bank.

He spreads a reckless sail to the wind and rides the turbulent water.

He who throws his doors open and steps onward receives your greeting.

He does not stay to count his gain or to mourn his loss; his heart beats the drum for his march, for that is to march with you every step,

Fellow−traveller!

XIV

MY portion of the best in this world will come from your hands: such was your promise.

Therefore your light glistens in my tears.

I fear to be led by others lest I miss you waiting in some road corner to be my guide.

I walk my own wilful way till my very folly tempts you to my door.

For I have your promise that my portion of the best in this world will come from your hands.

XV

YOUR speech is simple, my Master, but not theirs who talk of you.

I understand the voice of your stars and the silence of your trees.

I know that my heart would open like a flower; that my life has filled itself at a hidden fountain.

Your songs, like birds from the lonely land of snow, are winging to build their nests in my heart against the warmth of its April, and I am content to wait for the merry season.

XVI

THEY knew the way and went to seek you along the narrow lane, but I wandered abroad into the night for I was ignorant.

I was not schooled enough to be afraid of you in the dark, therefore I came upon your doorstep unaware.

The wise rebuked me and bade me be gone, for I had not come by the lane.

I turned away in doubt, but you held me fast, and their scolding became louder every day.

XVII

I BROUGHT out my earthen lamp from my house and cried, "Come, children, I will light your path!"

The night was still dark when I returned, leaving the road to its silence, crying, "Light me, O Fire! for my earthen lamp lies broken in the dust!"

XVIII

No: it is not yours to open buds into blossoms.

Shake the bud, strike it; it is beyond your power to make it blossom.

Your touch soils it, you tear its petals to pieces and strew them in the dust.

But no colours appear, and no perfume.

Ah! it is not for you to open the bud into a blossom.

He who can open the bud does it so simply.

He gives it a glance, and the life−sap stirs through its veins.

At his breath the flower spreads its wings and flutters in the wind.

Colours flush out like heart−longings, the perfume betrays a sweet secret.

He who can open the bud does it so simply.

XIX

SUDÂS, the gardener, plucked from his tank the last lotus left by the ravage of winter and went to sell it to the king at the palace gate.

There he met a traveller who said to him, "Ask your price for the last lotus, I shall offer it to Lord Buddha."

Sudâs said, "If you pay one golden *mâshâ* it will be yours.

The traveller paid it.

At that moment the king came out and he wished to buy the flower, for he was on his way to see Lord Buddha, and he thought, "It would be a fine thing to lay at his feet the lotus that bloomed in winter."

When the gardener said he had been offered a golden *mâshâ* the king offered him ten, but the traveller doubled the price.

The gardener, being greedy, imagined a greater gain from him for whose sake they were bidding. He bowed and said, "I cannot sell this lotus."

In the hushed shade of the mango grove beyond the city wall Sudâs stood before Lord Buddha, on whose lips sat the silence of love and whose eyes beamed peace like the morning star of the dew−washed autumn.

Sudâs looked in his face and put the lotus at his feet and bowed his head to the dust.

Buddha smiled and asked, "What is your wish, my son?"

Sudâs cried, "The least touch of your feet."

XX

MAKE me thy poet, O Night, veiled Night!

There are some who have sat speechless for ages in thy shadow; let me utter their songs.

Take me up on thy chariot without wheels, running noiselessly from world to world, thou queen in the palace of time, thou darkly beautiful!

Many a questioning mind has stealthily entered thy courtyard and roamed through thy lampless house seeking for answers.

From many a heart, pierced with the arrow of joy from the hands of the Unknown, have burst forth glad chants, shaking the darkness to its foundation.

Those wakeful souls gaze in the starlight in wonder at the treasure they have suddenly found.

Make me their poet, O Night, the poet of thy fathomless silence.

XXI

I WILL meet one day the Life within me, the joy that hides in my life, though the days perplex my path with their idle dust.

I have known it in glimpses, and its fitful breath has come upon me, making my thoughts fragrant for a while.

I will meet one day the Joy without me that dwells behind the screen of light and will stand in the overflowing solitude where all things are seen as by their creator.

XXII

THIS autumn morning is tired with excess of light, and if your songs grow fitful and languid give me your flute awhile.

I shall but play with it as the whim takes me, now take it on my lap, now touch it with my lips, now keep it by my side on the grass.

But in the solemn evening stillness I shall gather flowers, to deck it with wreaths, I shall fill it with fragrance; I shall worship it with the lighted lamp.

Then at night I shall come to you and give you back your flute.

You will play on it the music of midnight when the lonely crescent moon wanders among the stars.

XXIII

THE poet's mind floats and dances on the waves of life amidst the voices of wind and water.

Now when the sun has set and the darkened sky draws upon the sea like drooping lashes upon a weary eye it is time to take away his pen, and let his thoughts sink into the bottom of the deep amid the eternal secret of that silence.

XXIV

THE night is dark and your slumber is deep in the hush of my being.

Wake, O Pain of Love, for I know not how to open the door, and I stand outside.

The hours wait, the stars watch, the wind is still, the silence is heavy in my heart.

Wake, Love, wake! brim my empty cup, and with a breath of song ruffle the night.

XXV

THE bird of the morning sings.

Whence has he word of the morning before the morning breaks, and when the dragon night still holds the sky

in its cold black coils?

Tell me, bird of the morning, how, through the twofold night of the sky and the leaves, he found his way into your dream, the messenger out of the east?

The world did not believe you when you cried, "The sun is on his way, the night is no more."

O sleeper, awake!

Bare your forehead, waiting for the first blessing of light, and sing with the bird of the morning in glad faith.

XXVI

THE beggar in me lifted his lean hands to the starless sky and cried into night's ear with his hungry voice.

His prayers were to the blind Darkness who lay like a fallen god in a desolate heaven of lost hopes.

The cry of desire eddied round a chasm of despair, a wailing bird circling its empty nest.

But when morning dropped anchor at the rim of the East, the beggar in me leapt and cried:

"Blessed am I that the deaf night denied me that its coffer was empty."

He cried, "O Life, O Light, you are precious! and precious is the joy that at last has known you!"

XXVII

SANÂTAN was telling his beads by the Ganges when a Brahmin in rags came to him and said, "Help me, I am poor!"

"My alms−bowl is all that is my own," said Sanâtan, "I have given away everything I had."

"But my lord Shiva came to me in my dreams," said the Brahmin, "and counselled me to come to you."

Sanâtan suddenly remembered he had picked up a stone without price among the pebbles on the river−bank, and thinking that some one might need it hid it in the sands.

He pointed out the spot to the Brahmin, who wondering dug up the stone.

The Brahmin sat on the earth and mused alone till the sun went down behind the trees, and cowherds went home with their cattle.

Then he rose and came slowly to Sanâtan and said, "Master, give me the least fraction of the wealth that disdains all the wealth of the world."

And he threw the precious stone into the water.

XXVIII

TIME after time I came to your gate with raised hands, asking for more and yet more.

You gave and gave, now in slow measure, now in sudden excess.

I took some, and some things I let drop; some lay heavy on my hands; some I made into playthings and broke them when tired; till the wrecks and the hoard of your gifts grew immense, hiding you, and the ceaseless expectation wore my heart out.

Take, oh take has now become my cry.

Shatter all from this beggar's bowl: put out this lamp of the importunate watcher: hold my hands, raise me from the still−gathering heap of your gifts into the bare infinity of your uncrowded presence.

XXIX

YOU have set me among those who are defeated.

I know it is not for me to win, nor to leave the game.

I shall plunge into the pool although but to sink to the bottom.

I shall play the game of my undoing.

I shall stake all I have and when I lose my last penny I shall stake myself, and then I think I shall have won through my utter defeat.

XXX

A SMILE of mirth spread over the sky when you dressed my heart in rags and sent her forth into the road to beg.

She went from door to door, and many a time when her bowl was nearly full she was robbed.

At the end of the weary day she came to your palace gate holding up her pitiful bowl, and you came and took her hand and seated her beside you on your throne.

XXXI

"WHO among you will take up the duty of feeding the hungry?" Lord Buddha asked his followers when famine raged at Shravasti.

Ratnâkar, the banker, hung his head and said, "Much more is needed than all my wealth to feed the hungry."

Jaysen, the chief of the King's army, said, "I would gladly give my life's blood, but there is not enough food in my house."

Dharmapâal, who owned broad acres of land, said with a sigh, "The drought demon has sucked my fields dry. I know not how to pay King's dues."

Then rose Supriyâ, the mendicant's daughter.

She bowed to all and meekly said, "I will feed the hungry."

"How!" they cried in surprise. "How can you hope to fulfil that vow?"

"I am the poorest of you all," said Supriyâ, "that is my strength. I have my coffer and my store at each of your houses."

XXXII

MY king was unknown to me, therefore when he claimed his tribute I was bold to think I would hide myself leaving my debts unpaid.

I fled and fled behind my day's work and my night's dreams.

But his claims followed me at every breath I drew.

Thus I came to know that I am known to him and no place left which is mine.

Now I wish to lay my all before his feet, and gain the right to my place in his kingdom.

XXXIII

WHEN I thought I would mould you, an image from my life for men to worship, I brought my dust and desires and all my coloured delusions and dreams.

When I asked you to mould with my life an image from your heart for you to love, you brought your fire and force, and truth, loveliness and peace.

XXXIV

"SIRE," announced the servant to the King, "the saint Narottam has never deigned to enter your royal temple.

"He is singing God's praise under the trees by the open road. The temple is empty of worshippers.

"They flock round him like bees round the white lotus, leaving the golden jar of honey unheeded."

The King, vexed at heart, went to the spot where Narottam sat on the grass.

He asked him, "Father, why leave my temple of the golden dome and sit on the dust outside to preach God's love?"

"Because God is not there in your temple," said Narottam.

The King frowned and said, "Do you know, twenty millions of gold went to the making of that marvel of art, and it was consecrated to God with costly rites?"

"Yes, I know it," answered Narottam. "It was in that year when thousands of your people whose houses had been burned stood vainly asking for help at your door.

"And God said, 'The poor creature who can give no shelter to his brothers would build my house!'

"And he took his place with the shelterless under the trees by the road.

"And that golden bubble is empty of all but hot vapour of pride."

The King cried in anger, "Leave my land."

Calmly said the saint, "Yes, banish me where you have banished my God."

XXXV

THE trumpet lies in the dust.

The wind is weary, the light is dead.

Ah, the evil day!

Come, fighters, carrying your flags, and singers, with your war−songs!

Come, pilgrims of the march, hurrying on your journey!

The trumpet lies in the dust waiting for us.

I was on my way to the temple with my evening offerings, seeking for a place of rest after the day's dusty toil: hoping my hurts would be healed and the stains in my garment washed white, when I found thy trumpet lying in the dust.

Was it not the hour for me to light my evening lamp?

Had not the night sung its lullaby to the stars?

O thou blood−red rose, my poppies of sleep have paled and faded!

I was certain my wanderings were over and my debts all paid when suddenly I came upon thy trumpet lying in the dust.

Strike my drowsy heart with thy spell of youth!

Let my joy in life blaze up in fire. Let the shafts of awakening fly through the heart of night, and a thrill of dread shake blindness and palsy.

I have come to raise thy trumpet from the dust.

Sleep is no more for me my walk shall be through showers of arrows.

Some shall run out of their houses and come to my side some shall weep.

Some in their beds shall toss and groan in dire dreams.

For to−night thy trumpet shall be sounded.

From thee I have asked peace only to find shame.

Now I stand before thee help me to put on my armour!

Let hard blows of trouble strike fire into my life.

Let my heart beat in pain, the drum of thy victory.

My hands shall be utterly emptied to take up thy trumpet.

XXXVI

WHEN, mad in their mirth, they raised dust to soil thy robe, O Beautiful, it made my heart sick.

I cried to thee and said, "Take thy rod of punishment and judge them."

The morning light struck upon those eyes, red with the revel of night; the place of the white lily greeted their burning breath; the stars through the depth of the sacred dark stared at their carousing at those that raised dust to soil thy robe, O Beautiful!

Thy judgment seat was in the flower garden, in the birds' notes in springtime: in the shady river−banks, where the trees muttered in answer to the muttering of the waves.

O my Lover, they were pitiless in their passion.

They prowled in the dark to snatch thy ornaments to deck their own desires.

When they had struck thee and thou wert pained, it pierced me to the quick, and I cried to thee and said, "Take thy sword, O my Lover, and judge them!"

Ah, but thy justice was vigilant.

A mother's tears were shed on their insolence; the imperishable faith of a lover hid their spears of rebellion in its own wounds.

Thy judgment was in the mute pain of sleepless love: in the blush of the chaste: in the tears of the night of the desolate: in the pale morning−light of forgiveness.

O Terrible, they in their reckless greed climbed thy gate at night, breaking into thy storehouse to rob thee.

But the weight of their plunder grew immense, too heavy to carry or to remove.

Thereupon I cried to thee and said, Forgive them, O Terrible!

Thy forgiveness burst in storms, throwing them down, scattering their thefts in the dust.

Thy forgiveness was in the thunder−stone; in the shower of blood; in the angry red of the sunset.

XXXVII

UPAGUPTA, the disciple of Buddha, lay asleep on the dust by the city wall of Mathura.

Lamps were all out, doors were all shut, and stars were all hidden by the murky sky of August.

Whose feet were those tinkling with anklets, touching his breast of a sudden?

He woke up startled, and the light from a woman's lamp struck his forgiving eyes.

It was the dancing girl, starred with jewels, clouded with a pale−blue mantle, drunk with the wine of her youth.

She lowered her lamp and saw the young face, austerely beautiful.

"Forgive me, young ascetic," said the woman; "graciously come to my house. The dusty earth is not a fit bed for you."

The ascetic answered, "Woman, go on your way; when the time is ripe I will come to you."

Suddenly the black night showed its teeth in a flash of lightning.

The storm growled from the corner of the sky, and the woman trembled in fear.

. . . .

The branches of the wayside trees were aching with blossom.

Gay notes of the flute came floating in the warm spring air from afar.

The citizens had gone to the woods, to the festival of flowers.

From the mid−sky gazed the full moon on the shadows of the silent town.

The young ascetic was walking in the lonely street, while overhead the lovesick *koels* urged from the mango branches their sleepless plaint.

Upagupta passed through the city gates, and stood at the base of the rampart.

What woman lay in the shadow of the wall at his feet, struck with the black pestilence, her body spotted with sores, hurriedly driven away from the town?

The ascetic sat by her side, taking her head on his knees, and moistened her lips with water and smeared her body with balm.

"Who are you, merciful one?" asked the woman.

"The time, at last, has come to visit you, and I am here," replied the young ascetic.

XXXVIII

THIS is no mere dallying of love between us, my lover.

Again and again have swooped down upon me the screaming nights of storm, blowing out my lamp: dark doubts have gathered, blotting out all stars from my sky.

Again and again the banks have burst, letting the flood sweep away my harvest, and wailing and despair have rent my sky from end to end.

This have I learnt that there are blows of pain in your love, never the cold apathy of death.

XXXIX

THE wall breaks asunder, light, like divine laughter, bursts in.

Victory, O Light!

The heart of the night is pierced!

With your flashing sword cut in twain the tangle of doubt and feeble desires!

Victory!

Come, Implacable!

Come, you who are terrible in your whiteness.

O Light, your drum sounds in the march of fire, and the red torch is held on high; death dies in a burst of splendour!

XL

O FIRE, my brother, I sing victory to you.

You are the bright red image of fearful freedom.

You swing your arms in the sky, you sweep your impetuous fingers across the harp−string, your dance music is beautiful.

When my days are ended and the gates are opened you will burn to ashes this cordage of hands and feet.

My body will be one with you, my heart will be caught in the whirls of your frenzy, and the burning heat that was my life will flash up and mingle itself in your flame.

XLI

THE Boatman is out crossing the wild sea at night.

The mast is aching because of its full sails filled with the violent wind.

Stung with the night's fang the sky falls upon the sea, poisoned with black fear.

The waves dash their heads against the dark unseen, and the Boatman is out crossing the wild sea.

The Boatman is out, I know not for what tryst, startling the night with the sudden white of his sails.

I know not at what shore, at last, he lands to reach the silent courtyard where the lamp is burning and to find her who sits in the dust and waits.

What is the quest that makes his boat care not for storm nor darkness?

Is it heavy with gems and pearls?

Ah, no, the Boatman brings with him no treasure, but only a white rose in his hand and a song on his lips.

It is for her who watches alone at night with her lamp burning.

She dwells in the wayside hut. Her loose hair flies in the wind and hides her eyes.

The storm shrieks through her broken doors, the light flickers in her earthen lamp flinging shadows on the walls.

Through the howl of the winds she hears him call her name, she whose name is unknown.

It is long since the Boatman sailed. It will be long before the day breaks and he knocks at the door.

The drums will not be beaten and none will know.

Only light shall fill the house, blessed shall be the dust, and the heart glad.

All doubts shall vanish in silence when the Boatman comes to the shore.

XLII

I CLING to this living raft, my body, in the narrow stream of my earthly years.

I leave it when the crossing is over. And then?

I do not know if the light there and the darkness are the same.

The Unknown is the perpetual freedom:

He is pitiless in his love.

He crushes the shell for the pearl, dumb in the prison of the dark.

You muse and weep for the days that are done, poor heart!

Be glad that days are to come!

The hour strikes, O pilgrim!

It is time for you to take the parting of the ways!

His face will be unveiled once again and you shall meet.

XLIII

OVER the relic of Lord Buddha King Bimbisâr built a shrine, a salutation in white marble.

There in the evening would come all the brides and daughters of the King's house to offer flowers and light lamps.

When the son became king in his time he washed his father's creed away with blood, and lit sacrificial fires with its sacred books.

The autumn day was dying. The evening hour of worship was near.

Shrimati, the queen's maid, devoted to Lord Buddha, having bathed in holy water, and decked the golden tray with lamps and fresh white blossoms, silently raised her dark eyes to the queen's face.

The queen shuddered in fear and said, "Do you not know, foolish girl, that death is the penalty for whoever brings worship to Buddha's shrine?

"Such is the king's will."

Shrimati bowed to the queen, and turning away from her door came and stood before Amitâ, the newly wed bride of the king's son.

A mirror of burnished gold on her lap, the newly wed bride was braiding her dark long tresses and painting the red spot of good luck at the parting of her hair.

Her hands trembled when she saw the young maid, and she cried, "What fearful peril would you bring me! Leave me this instant."

Princess Shuklâ sat at the window reading her book of romance by the light of the setting sun.

She started when she saw at her door the maid with the sacred offerings.

Her book fell down from her lap, and she whispered in Shrimati's ears, "Rush not to death, daring woman!"

Shrimati walked from door to door. She raised her head and cried, "O women of the king's house, hasten!

"The time for our Lord's worship is come!"

Some shut their doors in her face and some reviled her.

The last gleam of daylight faded from the bronze dome of the palace tower.

Deep shadows settled in street corners: the bustle of the city was hushed: the gong at the temple of Shiva announced the time of the evening prayer.

In the dark of the autumn evening, deep as a limpid lake, stars throbbed with light, when the guards of the

palace garden were startled to see through the trees a row of lamps burning at the shrine of Buddha.

They ran with their swords unsheathed, crying, "Who are you, foolish one, reckless of death?"

"I am Shrimati," replied a sweet voice, "the servant of Lord Buddha."

The next moment her heart's blood coloured the cold marble with its red.

And in the still hour of stars died the light of the last lamp of worship at the foot of the shrine.

XLIV

THE day that stands between you and me makes her last bow of farewell.

The night draws her veil over her face, and hides the one lamp burning in my chamber.

Your dark servant comes noiselessly and spreads the bridal carpet for you to take your seat there alone with me in the wordless silence till night is done.

XLV

MY night has passed on the bed of sorrow, and my eyes are tired. My heavy heart is not yet ready to meet morning with its crowded joys.

Draw a veil over this naked light, beckon aside from me this glaring flash and dance of life.

Let the mantle of tender darkness cover me in its folds, and cover my pain awhile from the pressure of the world.

XLVI

THE time is past when I could repay her for all that I received.

Her night has found its morning and thou hast taken her to thy arms: and to thee I bring my gratitude and my gifts that were for her.

For all hurts and offences to her I come to thee for forgiveness.

I offer to thy service those flowers of my love that remained in bud when she waited for them to open.

XLVII

I FOUND a few old letters of mine carefully hidden in her box a few small toys for her memory to play with.

With a timorous heart she tried to steal these trifles from time's turbulent stream, and said, "These are mine only!"

Ah, there is no one now to claim them, who can pay their price with loving care, yet here they are still.

Surely there is love in this world to save her from utter loss, even like this love of hers that saved these letters with such fond care.

XLVIII

BRING beauty and order into my forlorn life, woman, as you brought them into my house when you lived.

Sweep away the dusty fragments of the hours, fill the empty jars, and mend all that has been neglected.

Then open the inner door of the shrine, light the candle, and let us meet there in silence before our God.

XLIX

THE pain was great when the strings were being tuned, my Master!

Begin your music, and let me forget the pain; let me feel in beauty what you had in your mind through those pitiless days.

The waning night lingers at my doors, let her take her leave in songs.

Pour your heart into my life strings, my Master, in tunes that descend from your stars.

L

IN the lightning flash of a moment I have seen the immensity of your creation in my life creation through many a death from world to world.

I weep at my unworthiness when I see my life in the hands of the unmeaning hours, but when I see it in your hands I know it is too precious to be squandered among shadows.

LI

I KNOW that at the dim end of some day the sun will bid me its farewell.

Shepherds will play their pipes beneath the banyan trees, and cattle graze on the slope by the river, while my days will pass into the dark.

This is my prayer, that I may know before I leave why the earth called me to her arms.

Why her night's silence spoke to me of stars, and her daylight kissed my thoughts into flower.

Before I go may I linger over my last refrain, completing its music, may the lamp be lit to see your face and the wreath woven to crown you.

LII

WHAT music is that in whose measure the world is rocked?

We laugh when it beats upon the crest of life, we shrink in terror when it returns into the dark.

But the play is the same that comes and goes with the rhythm of the endless music.

You hide your treasure in the palm of your hand, and we cry that we are robbed.

But open and shut your palm as you will, the gain and the loss are the same.

At the game you play with your own self you lose and win at once.

LIII

I HAVE kissed this world with my eyes and my limbs; I have wrapt it within my heart in numberless folds; I have flooded its days and nights with thoughts till the world and my life have grown one, and I love my life because I love the light of the sky so enwoven with me.

If to leave this world be as real as to love it then there must be a meaning in the meeting and the parting of life.

If that love were deceived in death, then the canker of this deceit would eat into all things, and the stars would shrivel and grow black.

LIV

THE Cloud said to me, "I vanish"; the Night said, "I plunge into the fiery dawn."

The Pain said, "I remain in deep silence as his footprint."

"I die into the fulness," said my life to me.

The Earth said, "My lights kiss your thoughts every moment."

"The days pass," Love said, "but I wait for you."

Death said, "I ply the boat of your life across the sea."

LV

TULSIDAS, the poet, was wandering, deep in thought, by the Ganges, in that lonely spot where they burn their dead.

He found a woman sitting at the feet of the corpse of her dead husband, gaily dressed as for a wedding.

She rose as she saw him, bowed to him, and said, "Permit me, Master, with your blessing, to follow my husband to heaven."

"Why such hurry, my daughter?" asked Tulsidas. "Is not this earth also His who made heaven?"

"For heaven I do not long," said the woman. "I want my husband."

Tulsidas smiled and said to her, "Go back to your home, my child. Before the month is over you will find your husband."

The woman went back with glad hope. Tulsidas came to her every day and gave her high thoughts to think, till her heart was filled to the brim with divine love.

When the month was scarcely over, her neighbours came to her, asking, "Woman, have you found your husband?"

The widow smiled and said, "I have."

Eagerly they asked, "Where is he?"

"In my heart is my lord, one with me," said the woman.

LVI

You came for a moment to my side and touched me with the great mystery of the woman that there is in the heart of creation.

She who is ever returning to God his own outflo wing of sweetness; she is the ever fresh beauty and youth in nature; she dances in the bubbling streams and sings in the morning light; she with heaving waves suckles the thirsty earth; in her the Eternal One breaks in two in a joy that no longer may contain itself, and overflows in the pain of love.

LVII

WHO is she who dwells in my heart, the woman forlorn for ever?

I wooed her and I failed to win her. I decked her with wreaths and sang in her praise.

A smile shone in her face for a moment, then it faded.

"I have no joy in thee," she cried, the woman in sorrow.

I bought her jewelled anklets and fanned her with a fan gem−studded; I made her a bed on a bedstead of gold.

There flickered a gleam of gladness in her eyes, then it died.

"I have no joy in these," she cried, the woman in sorrow.

I seated her upon a car of triumph and drove her from end to end of the earth.

Conquered hearts bowed down at her feet, and shouts of applause rang in the sky.

Pride shone in her eyes for a moment, then it was dimmed in tears.

"I have no joy in conquest," she cried, the woman in sorrow.

I asked her, "Tell me whom do you seek?"

She only said, "I wait for him of the unknown name."

Days pass by and she cries, "When will my beloved come whom I know not, and be known to me for ever?"

LVIII

YOURS is the light that breaks forth from the dark, and the good that sprouts from the cleft heart of strife.

Yours is the house that opens upon the world, and the love that calls to the battlefield.

Yours is the gift that still is a gain when everything is a loss, and the life that flows through the caverns of death.

Yours is the heaven that lies in the common dust, and you are there for me, you are there for all.

LIX

WHEN the weariness of the road is upon me, and the thirst of the sultry day; when the ghostly hours of the dusk throw their shadows across my life, then I cry not for your voice only, my friend, but for your touch.

There is an anguish in my heart for the burden of its riches not given to you.

Put out your hand through the night, let me hold it and fill it and keep it; let me feel its touch along the lengthening stretch of my loneliness.

LX

THE odour cries in the bud, "Ah me, the day departs, the happy day of spring, and I am a prisoner in petals!"

Do not lose heart, timid thing! Your bonds will burst, the bud will open into flower, and when you die in the fulness of life, even then the spring will live on.

The odour pants and flutters within the bud, crying, "Ah me, the hours pass by, yet I do not know where I go, or what it is I seek!"

Do not lose heart, timid thing! The spring breeze has overheard your desire, the day will not end before you have fulfilled your being.

Dark is the future to her, and the odour cries in despair, "Ah me, through whose fault is my life so unmeaning?

"Who can tell me, why I am at all?" Do not lose heart, timid thing! The perfect dawn is near when you will mingle your life with all life and know at last your purpose.

LXI

SHE is still a child, my lord.

She runs about your palace and plays, and tries to make of you a plaything as well.

She heeds not when her hair tumbles down and her careless garment drags in the dust.

She falls asleep when you speak to her and answers not and the flower you give her in the morning slips to the dust from her hands.

When the storm bursts and darkness is over the sky she is sleepless; her dolls lie scattered on the earth and she clings to you in terror.

She is afraid that she may fail in service to you.

But with a smile you watch her at her game.

You know her.

The child sitting in the dust is your destined bride; her play will be stilled and deepened into love.

LXII

"WHAT is there but the sky, O Sun, that can hold thine image?"

"I dream of thee, but to serve thee I can never hope," the dewdrop wept and said, "I am too small to take thee unto me, great lord, and my life is all tears."

"I illumine the limitless sky, yet I can yield myself up to a tiny drop of dew," thus the Sun said; "I shall become but a sparkle of light and fill you, and your little life will be a laughing orb."

LXIII

NOT for me is the love that knows no restraint, but like the foaming wine that having burst its vessel in a moment would run to waste.

Send me the love which is cool and pure like your rain that blesses the thirsty earth and fills the homely earthen jars.

Send me the love that would soak down into the centre of being, and from there would spread like the unseen sap through the branching tree of life, giving birth to fruits and flowers.

Send me the love that keeps the heart still with the fulness of peace.

LXIV

THE sun had set on the western margin of the river among the tangle of the forest.

The hermit boys had brought the cattle home, and sat round the fire to listen to the master, Guatama, when a strange boy came, and greeted him with fruits and flowers, and, bowing low at his feet, spoke in a bird−like voice "Lord, I have come to thee to be taken into the path of the supreme Truth.

"My name is Satyakâma."

"Blessings be on thy head," said the master.

"Of what clan art thou, my child? It is only fitting for a Brahmin to aspire to the highest wisdom."

"Master," answered the boy, "I know not of what clan I am. I shall go and ask my mother."

Thus saying, Satyakma took leave, and wading across the shallow stream, came back to his mother's hut, which stood at the end of the sandy waste at the edge of the sleeping village.

The lamp burnt dimly in the room, and the mother stood at the door in the dark waiting for her son's return.

She clasped him to her bosom, kissed him on his hair, and asked him of his errand to the master.

"What is the name of my father, dear mother?" asked the boy.

"It is only fitting for a Brahmin to aspire to the highest wisdom, said Lord Guatama to me."

The woman lowered her eyes, and spoke in a whisper.

"In my youth I was poor and had many masters. Thou didst come to thy mother Jabâlâ's arms, my darling, who had no husband."

The early rays of the sun glistened on the tree−tops of the forest hermitage.

The students, with their tangled hair still wet with their morning bath, sat under the ancient tree, before the master.

There came Satyakâma.

He bowed low at the feet of the sage, and stood silent.

"Tell me," the great teacher asked him, "of what clan art thou?"

"My lord," he answered, "I know it not. My mother said when I asked her, 'I had served many masters in my youth, and thou hadst come to thy mother Jabâlâ's arms, who had no husband.'"

There rose a murmur like the angry hum of bees disturbed in their hive; and the students muttered at the shameless insolence of that outcast.

Master Guatama rose from his seat, stretched out his arms, took the boy to his bosom, and said, "Best of all Brahmins art thou, my child. Thou hast the noblest heritage of truth."

LXV

MAY be there is one house in this city where the gate opens for ever this morning at the touch of the sunrise, where the errand of the light is fulfilled.

The flowers have opened in hedges and gardens, and may be there is one heart that has found in them this morning the gift that has been on its voyage from endless time.

LXVI

LISTEN, my heart, in his flute is the music of the smell of wild flowers, of the glistening leaves and gleaming water, of shadows resonant with bees' wings.

The flute steals his smile from my friend's lips and spreads it over my life.

LXVII

You always stand alone beyond the stream of my songs.

The waves of my tunes wash your feet but I know not how to reach them.

This play of mine with you is a play from afar.

It is the pain of separation that melts into melody through my flute.

I wait for the time when your boat crosses over to my shore and you take my flute into your own hands.

LXVIII

SUDDENLY the window of my heart flew open this morning, the window that looks out on your heart.

I wondered to see that the name by which you know me is written in April leaves and flowers, and I sat silent.

The curtain was blown away for a moment between my songs and yours.

I found that your morning light was full of my own mute songs unsung; I thought that I would learn them at your feet and I sat silent.

LXIX

You were in the centre of my heart, therefore when my heart wandered she never found you; you hid yourself from my loves and hopes till the last, for you were always in them.

You were the inmost joy in the play of my youth, and when I was too busy with the play the joy was passed by.

You sang to me in the ecstasies of my life and I forgot to sing to you.

LXX

WHEN you hold your lamp in the sky it throws its light on my face and its shadow falls over you.

When I hold the lamp of love in my heart its light falls on you and I am left standing behind in the shadow.

LXXI

O THE waves, the sky−devouring waves, glistening with light, dancing with life, the waves of eddying joy, rushing for ever.

The stars rock upon them, thoughts of every tint are cast up out of the deep and scattered on the beach of life.

Birth and death rise and fall with their rhythm, and the sea−gull of my heart spreads its wings crying in delight.

LXXII

THE joy ran from all the world to build my body.

The lights of the skies kissed and kissed her till she woke.

Flowers of hurrying summers sighed in her breath and voices of winds and water sang in her movements.

The passion of the tide of colours in clouds and in forests flowed into her life, and the music of all things caressed her limbs into shape.

She is my bride, she has lighted her lamp in my house.

LXXIII

THE spring with its leaves and flowers has come into my body.

The bees hum there the morning long, and the winds idly play with the shadows.

A sweet fountain springs up from the heart of my heart.

My eyes are washed with delight like the dew−bathed morning, and life is quivering in all my limbs like the sounding strings of the lute.

Are you wandering alone by the shore of my life, where the tide is in flood, O lover of my endless days?

Are my dreams flitting round you like the moths with their many−coloured wings?

And are those your songs that are echoing in the dark eaves of my being?

Who but you can hear the hum of the crowded hours that sounds in my veins to−day, the glad steps that dance in my breast, the clamour of the restless life beating its wings in my body?

LXXIV

MY bonds are cut, my debts are paid, my door has been opened, I go everywhere.

They crouch in their corner and weave their web of pale hours, they count their coins sitting in the dust and call me back.

But my sword is forged, my armour is put on, my horse is eager to run.

I shall win my kingdom.

LXXV

IT was only the other day that I came to your earth, naked and nameless, with a wailing cry.

To−day my voice is glad, while you, my lord, stand aside to make room that I may fill my life.

Even when I bring you my songs for an offering I have the secret hope that men will come and love me for them.

You love to discover that I love this world where you have brought me.

LXXVI

TIMIDLY I cowered in the shadow of safety, but now, when the surge of joy carries my heart upon its crest, my heart clings to the cruel rock of its trouble.

I sat alone in a corner of my house thinking it too narrow for any guest, but now when its door is flung open by an unbidden joy I find there is room for thee and for all the world.

I walked upon tiptoe, careful of my person, perfumed, and adorned but now when a glad whirlwind has overthrown me in the dust I laugh and roll on the earth at thy feet like a child.

LXXVII

THE world is yours at once and for ever.

And because you have no want, my king, you have no pleasure in your wealth.

It is as though it were naught. Therefore through slow time you give me what is yours, and ceaselessly win your kingdom in me.

Day after day you buy your sunrise from my heart, and you find your love carven into the image of my life.

LXXVIII

TO the birds you gave songs, the birds gave you songs in return.

You gave me only voice, yet asked for more, and I sing.

You made your winds light and they are fleet in their service. You burdened my hands that I myself may lighten them, and at last, gain unburdened freedom for your service.

You created your Earth filling its shadows with fragments of light.

There you paused; you left me empty−handed in the dust to create your heaven.

To all things else you give; from me you ask.

The harvest of my life ripens in the sun and the shower till I reap more than you sowed, gladdening your heart, O Master of the golden granary.

LXXIX

LET me not pray to be sheltered from dangers but to be fearless in facing them.

Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain but for the heart to conquer it.

Let me not look for allies in life's battlefield but to my own strength.

Let me not crave in anxious fear to be saved but hope for the patience to win my freedom.

Grant me that I may not be a coward, feeling your mercy in my success alone; but let me find the grasp of your hand in my failure.

LXXX

YOU did not know yourself when you dwelt alone, and there was no crying of an errand when the wind ran from the hither to the farther shore.

I came and you woke, and the skies blossomed with lights.

You made me open in many flowers; rocked me in the cradles of many forms; hid me in death and found me again in life.

I came and your heart heaved; pain came to you and joy.

You touched me and tingled into love.

But in my eyes there is a film of shame and in my breast a flicker of fear; my face is veiled and I weep when I cannot see you.

Yet I know the endless thirst in your heart for sight of me, the thirst that cries at my door in the repeated knockings of sunrise.

LXXXI

YOU, in your timeless watch, listen to my approaching steps while your gladness gathers in the morning twilight and breaks in the burst of light.

The nearer I draw to you the deeper grows the fervour in the dance of the sea.

Your world is a branching spray of light filling your hands, but your heaven is in my secret heart; it slowly opens its buds in shy love.

LXXXII

I WILL utter your name, sitting alone among the shadows of my silent thoughts.

I will utter it without words, I will utter it without purpose.

For I am like a child that calls its mother an hundred times, glad that it can say "Mother."

LXXXIII

I

I FEEL that all the stars shine in me. The world breaks into my life like a flood.

The flowers blossom in my body. All the youthfulness of land and water smokes like an incense in my heart; and the breath of all things plays on my thoughts as on a flute.

II

When the world sleeps I come to your door.

The stars are silent, and I am afraid to sing.

I wait and watch, till your shadow passes by the balcony of night and I return with a full heart.

Then in the morning I sing by the roadside;

The flowers in the hedge give me answer and the morning air listens,

The travellers suddenly stop and look in my face, thinking I have called them by their names.

III

Keep me at your door ever attending to your wishes, and let me go about in your Kingdom accepting your call.

Let me not sink and disappear in the depth of languor.

Let not my life be worn out to tatters by penury of waste.

Let not those doubts encompass me, the dust of distractions.

Let me not pursue many paths to gather many things.

Let me not bend my heart to the yoke of the many.

Let me hold my head high in the courage and pride of being your servant.

LXXXIV. THE OARSMEN

Do you hear the tumult of death afar,
The call midst the fire−floods and poisonous clouds
The Captain's call to the steersman to turn the ship to an unnamed shore,
For that time is over the stagnant time in the port
Where the same old merchandise is bought and sold in an endless round,
Where dead things drift in the exhaustion and emptiness of truth.

They wake up in sudden fear and ask,
"Comrades, what hour has struck?
When shall the dawn begin?"

The clouds have blotted away the stars
Who is there then can see the beckoning finger of the day?
They run out with oars in hand, the beds are emptied, the mother prays, the wife watches by the door;
There is a wail of parting that rises to the sky,
And there is the Captain's voice in the dark:
"Come, sailors, for the time in the harbour is over!"

All the black evils in the world have overflowed their banks,
Yet, oarsmen, take your places with the blessing of sorrow in your souls!
Whom do you blame, brothers? Bow your heads down!
The sin has been yours and ours.
The heat growing in the heart of God for ages
The cowardice of the weak, the arrogance of the strong, the greed of fat prosperity, the rancour of the wronged, pride of race, and insult to man
Has burst God's peace, raging in storm.

Like a ripe pod, let the tempest break its heart into pieces, scattering thunders.
Stop your bluster of dispraise and of self−praise,
And with the calm of silent prayer on your foreheads sail to that unnamed shore.

We have known sins and evils every day and death we have known;
They pass over our world like clouds mocking us with their transient lightning laughter.
Suddenly they have stopped, become a prodigy,
And men must stand before them saying:
"We do not fear you, O Monster! for we have lived every day by conquering you,
"And we die with the faith that Peace is true, and Good is true, and true is the eternal One!"

If the Deathless dwell not in the heart of death,
If glad wisdom bloom not bursting the sheath of sorrow,
If sin do not die of its own revealment,
If pride break not under its load of decorations,
Then whence comes the hope that drives these men from their homes like stars rushing to their death in the morning light?
Shall the value of the martyrs' blood and mothers' tears be utterly lost in the dust of the earth, not buying Heaven with their price?
And when Man bursts his mortal bounds, is not the Boundless revealed that moment?

LXXXV. THE SONG OF THE DEFEATED

MY Master has bid me while I stand at the roadside, to sing the song of Defeat, for that is the bride whom He woos in secret.

She has put on the dark veil, hiding her face from the crowd, but the jewel glows on her breast in the dark.

She is forsaken of the day, and God's night is waiting for her with its lamps lighted and flowers wet with dew.

She is silent with her eyes downcast; she has left her home behind her, from her home has come that wailing in the wind.

But the stars are singing the love−song of the eternal to a face sweet with shame and suffering.

The door has been opened in the lonely chamber, the call has sounded, and the heart of the darkness throbs with awe because of the coming tryst.

LXXXVI. THANKSGIVING

THOSE who walk on the path of pride crushing the lowly life under their tread, covering the tender green of the earth with their footprints in blood;

Let them rejoice, and thank thee, Lord, for the day is theirs.

But I am thankful that my lot lies with the humble who suffer and bear the burden of power, and hide their faces and stifle their sobs in the dark.

For every throb of their pain has pulsed in the secret depth of thy night, and every insult has been gathered into thy great silence. And the morrow is theirs.

O Sun, rise upon the bleeding hearts blossoming in flowers of the morning, and the torchlight revelry of pride shrunken to ashes.

THE END

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

GITANJALI

Song Offerings

A collection of prose translations
made by the author from
the original Bengali

With an introduction by
W. B. YEATS
to WILLIAM ROTHENSTEIN

INTRODUCTION

A few days ago I said to a distinguished Bengali doctor of medicine, 'I know no German, yet if a translation of a German poet had moved me, I would go to the British Museum and find books in English that would tell me something of his life, and of the history of his thought. But though these prose translations from Rabindranath Tagore have stirred my blood as nothing has for years, I shall not know anything of his life, and of the movements of thought that have made them possible, if some Indian traveller will not tell me.' It seemed to him natural that I should be moved, for he said, 'I read Rabindranath every day, to read one line of his is to forget all the troubles of the world.' I said, 'An Englishman living in London in the reign of Richard the Second had he been shown translations from Petrarch or from Dante, would have found no books to answer his questions, but would have questioned some Florentine banker or Lombard merchant as I question you. For all I know, so abundant and simple is this poetry, the new renaissance has been born in your country and I shall never know of it except by hearsay.' He answered,

'We have other poets, but none that are his equal; we call this the epoch of Rabindranath. No poet seems to me as famous in Europe as he is among us. He is as great in music as in poetry, and his songs are sung from the west of India into Burma wherever Bengali is spoken. He was already famous at nineteen when he wrote his first novel; and plays when he was but little older, are still played in Calcutta. I so much admire the completeness of his life; when he was very young he wrote much of natural objects, he would sit all day in his garden; from his twenty-fifth year or so to his thirty-fifth perhaps, when he had a great sorrow, he wrote the most beautiful love poetry in our language'; and then he said with deep emotion, 'words can never express what I owed at seventeen to his love poetry. After that his art grew deeper, it became religious and philosophical; all the inspiration of mankind are in his hymns. He is the first among our saints who has not refused to live, but has spoken out of Life itself, and that is why we give him our love.' I may have changed his well-chosen words in my memory but not his thought. 'A little while ago he was to read divine service in one of our churches--we of the Brahma Samaj use your word 'church' in English--it was the largest in Calcutta and not only was it crowded, but the streets were all but impassable because of the people.'

Other Indians came to see me and their reverence for this man sounded strange in our world, where we hide great and little things under the same veil of obvious comedy and half-serious depreciation. When we were making the cathedrals had we a like reverence for our great men? 'Every morning at three--I know, for I have seen it'--one said to me, 'he sits immovable in contemplation, and for two hours does not awake from his reverie upon the nature of God. His father, the Maha Rishi, would sometimes sit there all through the next day; once, upon a river, he fell into contemplation because of the beauty of the landscape, and the rowers waited for eight hours before they could continue their journey.' He then told me of Mr. Tagore's family and how for generations great men have come out of its cradles. 'Today,' he said, 'there are Gogonendranath and Abanindranath Tagore, who are artists; and Dwijendranath, Rabindranath's brother, who is a great philosopher. The squirrels come from the boughs and climb on to his knees and the birds alight upon his hands.' I notice in these men's thought a sense of visible beauty and meaning as though they held that doctrine of Nietzsche that we must not believe in the moral or

intellectual beauty which does not sooner or later impress itself upon physical things. I said, 'In the East you know how to keep a family illustrious. The other day the curator of a museum pointed out to me a little dark-skinned man who was arranging their Chinese prints and said, ''That is the hereditary connoisseur of the Mikado, he is the fourteenth of his family to hold the post.'' 'He answered, 'When Rabindranath was a boy he had all round him in his home literature and music.' I thought of the abundance, of the simplicity of the poems, and said, 'In your country is there much propagandist writing, much criticism? We have to do so much, especially in my own country, that our minds gradually cease to be creative, and yet we cannot help it. If our life was not a continual warfare, we would not have taste, we would not know what is good, we would not find hearers and readers. Four-fifths of our energy is spent in the quarrel with bad taste, whether in our own minds or in the minds of others.' 'I understand,' he replied, 'we too have our propagandist writing. In the villages they recite long mythological poems adapted from the Sanskrit in the Middle Ages, and they often insert passages telling the people that they must do their duties.'

I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me. These lyrics--which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention--display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my live long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble. If the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which--as one divines--runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other, something even of what is most subtle in these verses will have come, in a few generations, to the beggar on the roads. When there was but one mind in England, Chaucer wrote his _Troilus and Cressida_, and thought he had written to be read, or to be read out--for our time was coming on apace--he was sung by minstrels for a while. Rabindranath Tagore, like Chaucer's

forerunners, writes music for his words, and one understands at every moment that he is so abundant, so spontaneous, so daring in his passion, so full of surprise, because he is doing something which has never seemed strange, unnatural, or in need of defence. These verses will not lie in little well-printed books upon ladies' tables, who turn the pages with indolent hands that they may sigh over a life without meaning, which is yet all they can know of life, or be carried by students at the university to be laid aside when the work of life begins, but, as the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon the rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find, in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth. At every moment the heart of this poet flows outward to these without derogation or condescension, for it has known that they will understand; and it has filled itself with the circumstance of their lives. The traveller in the read-brown clothes that he wears that dust may not show upon him, the girl searching in her bed for the petals fallen from the wreath of her royal lover, the servant or the bride awaiting the master's home-coming in the empty house, are images of the heart turning to God. Flowers and rivers, the blowing of conch shells, the heavy rain of the Indian July, or the moods of that heart in union or in separation; and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God Himself. A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image, as though we had walked in Rossetti's willow wood, or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as in a dream.

Since the Renaissance the writing of European saints--however familiar their metaphor and the general structure of their thought--has ceased to hold our attention. We know that we must at last forsake the world, and we are accustomed in moments of weariness or exaltation to consider a voluntary forsaking; but how can we, who have read so much poetry, seen so many paintings, listened to so much music, where the cry of the flesh and the cry of the soul seems one, forsake it harshly and rudely? What have we in common with St. Bernard covering his eyes that they may not dwell upon the beauty of the lakes of Switzerland, or with the violent rhetoric of the Book of Revelations? We would, if we might, find, as in this book, words full of courtesy. 'I have

got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers! I bow to you all and take my departure. Here I give back the keys of my door--and I give up all claims to my house. I only ask for last kind words from you. We were neighbours for long, but I received more than I could give. Now the day has dawned and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out. A summons has come and I am ready for my journey.' And it is our own mood, when it is furthest from 'a Kempis or John of the Cross, that cries, 'And because I love this life, I know I shall love death as well.' Yet it is not only in our thoughts of the parting that this book fathoms all. We had not known that we loved God, hardly it may be that we believed in Him; yet looking backward upon our life we discover, in our exploration of the pathways of woods, in our delight in the lonely places of hills, in that mysterious claim that we have made, unavailingly on the woman that we have loved, the emotion that created this insidious sweetness. 'Entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd, unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment.' This is no longer the sanctity of the cell and of the scourge; being but a lifting up, as it were, into a greater intensity of the mood of the painter, painting the dust and the sunlight, and we go for a like voice to St. Francis and to William Blake who have seemed so alien in our violent history.

We write long books where no page perhaps has any quality to make writing a pleasure, being confident in some general design, just as we fight and make money and fill our heads with politics--all dull things in the doing--while Mr. Tagore, like the Indian civilization itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity. He often seems to contrast life with that of those who have loved more after our fashion, and have more seeming weight in the world, and always humbly as though he were only sure his way is best for him: 'Men going home glance at me and smile and fill me with shame. I sit like a beggar maid, drawing my skirt over my face, and when they ask me, what it is I want, I drop my eyes and answer them not.' At another time, remembering how his life had once a different shape, he will say, 'Many an hour I have spent in the strife of the good and the evil, but now it is the pleasure of my playmate of the empty days to draw my heart on to him; and I know not why this sudden call to what useless inconsequence.' An innocence, a simplicity that one does not find elsewhere in literature makes the birds and the leaves seem as near to him as they are near to children, and the changes of the seasons great events as before

our thoughts had arisen between them and us. At times I wonder if he has it from the literature of Bengal or from religion, and at other times, remembering the birds alighting on his brother's hands, I find pleasure in thinking it hereditary, a mystery that was growing through the centuries like the courtesy of a Tristan or a Pelanore. Indeed, when he is speaking of children, so much a part of himself this quality seems, one is not certain that he is not also speaking of the saints, 'They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of worlds. They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.'

W.B. YEATS _September 1912_

GITANJALI

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.

When thou commandest me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face, and tears come to my eyes.

All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony--and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea.

I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence.

I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach.

Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my lord.

I know not how thou singest, my master! I ever listen in silent amazement.

The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.

My heart longs to join in thy song, but vainly struggles for a voice. I would speak, but speech breaks not into song, and I cry out baffled. Ah, thou hast made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master!

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.

And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act.

I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side. The works that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.

Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor respite, and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil.

Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove.

Now it is time to sit quite, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of live in this silent and overflowing leisure.

Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! I fear lest it droop and drop into the dust.

I may not find a place in thy garland, but honour it with a touch of pain from thy hand and pluck it. I fear lest the day end before I am aware, and the time of offering go by.

Though its colour be not deep and its smell be faint, use this flower in thy service and pluck it while there is time.

My song has put off her adornments. She has no pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our union; they would come between thee and me; their jingling would drown thy whispers.

My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight. O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet. Only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music.

The child who is decked with prince's robes and who has jewelled chains round his neck loses all pleasure in his play; his dress hampers him at every step.

In fear that it may be frayed, or stained with dust he keeps himself from the world, and is afraid even to move.

Mother, it is no gain, thy bondage of finery, if it keep one shut off from the healthful dust of the earth, if it rob one of the right of entrance to the great fair of common human life.

O Fool, try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders! O beggar, to come beg at thy own door!

Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all, and never look behind in regret.

Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath. It is unholy--take not thy gifts through its unclean hands. Accept only what is offered by sacred love.

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes of the humble among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

My heart can never find its way to where thou keepest company with the companionless among the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost.

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put of thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense! What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.

The time that my journey takes is long and the way of it long.

I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light, and pursued my voyage through the wildernesses of worlds leaving my track on many a star and planet.

It is the most distant course that comes nearest to thyself, and that training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune.

The traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own, and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end.

My eyes strayed far and wide before I shut them and said 'Here art thou!'

The question and the cry 'Oh, where?' melt into tears of a thousand streams and deluge the world with the flood of the assurance 'I am!'

The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day.

I have spent my days in stringing and in unstringing my instrument.

The time has not come true, the words have not been rightly set; only there is the agony of wishing in my heart.

The blossom has not opened; only the wind is sighing by.

I have not seen his face, nor have I listened to his voice; only I have heard his gentle footsteps from the road before my house.

The livelong day has passed in spreading his seat on the floor; but the lamp has not been lit and I cannot ask him into my house.

I live in the hope of meeting with him; but this meeting is not yet.

My desires are many and my cry is pitiful, but ever didst thou save me by hard refusals; and this strong mercy has been wrought into my life through and through.

Day by day thou art making me worthy of the simple, great gifts that thou gavest to me unasked--this sky and the light, this body and the life and the mind--saving me from perils of overmuch desire.

There are times when I languidly linger and times when I awaken and hurry in search of my goal; but cruelly thou hidest thyself from before me.

Day by day thou art making me worthy of thy full acceptance by refusing me ever and anon, saving me from perils of weak, uncertain desire.

I am here to sing thee songs. In this hall of thine I have a corner seat.

In thy world I have no work to do; my useless life can only break out in tunes without a purpose.

When the hour strikes for thy silent worship at the dark temple of midnight, command me, my master, to stand before thee to sing.

When in the morning air the golden harp is tuned, honour me, commanding my presence.

I have had my invitation to this world's festival, and thus my life has been blessed. My eyes have seen and my ears have heard.

It was my part at this feast to play upon my instrument, and I have done all I could.

Now, I ask, has the time come at last when I may go in and see thy face and offer thee my silent salutation?

I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands. That is why it is so late and why I have been guilty of such omissions.

They come with their laws and their codes to bind me fast; but I evade them ever, for I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands.

People blame me and call me heedless; I doubt not they are right in their blame.

The market day is over and work is all done for the busy. Those who came to call me in vain have gone back in anger. I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands.

Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens. Ah, love, why dost thou let me wait outside at the door all alone?

In the busy moments of the noontide work I am with the crowd, but on this dark lonely day it is only for thee that I hope.

If thou showest me not thy face, if thou leavest me wholly aside, I know not how I am to pass these long, rainy hours.

I keep gazing on the far-away gloom of the sky, and my heart wanders wailing with the restless wind.

If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it. I will keep still and wait like the night with starry vigil and its head bent low with patience.

The morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish, and thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking through the sky.

Then thy words will take wing in songs from every one of my birds' nests, and thy melodies will break forth in flowers in all my forest groves.

On the day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my mind was straying, and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded.

Only now and again a sadness fell upon me, and I started up from my dream and felt a sweet trace of a strange fragrance in the

south wind.

That vague sweetness made my heart ache with longing and it seemed to me that is was the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion.

I knew not then that it was so near, that it was mine, and that this perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart.

I must launch out my boat. The languid hours pass by on the shore--Alas for me!

The spring has done its flowering and taken leave. And now with the burden of faded futile flowers I wait and linger.

The waves have become clamorous, and upon the bank in the shady lane the yellow leaves flutter and fall.

What emptiness do you gaze upon! Do you not feel a thrill passing through the air with the notes of the far-away song floating from the other shore?

In the deep shadows of the rainy July, with secret steps, thou walkest, silent as night, eluding all watchers.

Today the morning has closed its eyes, heedless of the insistent calls of the loud east wind, and a thick veil has been drawn over the ever-wakeful blue sky.

The woodlands have hushed their songs, and doors are all shut at every house. Thou art the solitary wayfarer in this deserted street. Oh my only friend, my best beloved, the gates are open in my house--do not pass by like a dream.

Art thou abroad on this stormy night on thy journey of love, my friend? The sky groans like one in despair.

I have no sleep tonight. Ever and again I open my door and look out on the darkness, my friend!

I can see nothing before me. I wonder where lies thy path!

By what dim shore of the ink-black river, by what far edge of the frowning forest, through what mazy depth of gloom art thou threading thy course to come to me, my friend?

If the day is done, if birds sing no more, if the wind has flagged tired, then draw the veil of darkness thick upon me, even as thou hast wrapt the earth with the coverlet of sleep and tenderly closed the petals of the drooping lotus at dusk.

From the traveller, whose sack of provisions is empty before the voyage is ended, whose garment is torn and dustladen, whose strength is exhausted, remove shame and poverty, and renew his life like a flower under the cover of thy kindly night.

In the night of weariness let me give myself up to sleep without struggle, resting my trust upon thee.

Let me not force my flagging spirit into a poor preparation for thy worship.

It is thou who drawest the veil of night upon the tired eyes of the day to renew its sight in a fresher gladness of awakening.

He came and sat by my side but I woke not. What a cursed sleep it was, O miserable me!

He came when the night was still; he had his harp in his hands, and my dreams became resonant with its melodies.

Alas, why are my nights all thus lost? Ah, why do I ever miss his sight whose breath touches my sleep?

Light, oh where is the light? Kindle it with the burning fire of desire!

There is the lamp but never a flicker of a flame--is such thy fate, my heart? Ah, death were better by far for thee!

Misery knocks at thy door, and her message is that thy lord is wakeful, and he calls thee to the love-tryst through the darkness of night.

The sky is overcast with clouds and the rain is ceaseless. I know not what this is that stirs in me--I know not its meaning.

A moment's flash of lightning drags down a deeper gloom on my sight, and my heart gropes for the path to where the music of the night calls me.

Light, oh where is the light! Kindle it with the burning fire of desire! It thunders and the wind rushes screaming through the void. The night is black as a black stone. Let not the hours pass by in the dark. Kindle the lamp of love with thy life.

Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches when I try to break them.

Freedom is all I want, but to hope for it I feel ashamed.

I am certain that priceless wealth is in thee, and that thou art my best friend, but I have not the heart to sweep away the tinsel that fills my room

The shroud that covers me is a shroud of dust and death; I hate it, yet hug it in love.

My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy; yet when I come to ask for my good, I quake in fear lest my prayer be granted.

He whom I enclose with my name is weeping in this dungeon. I am ever busy building this wall all around; and as this wall goes up into the sky day by day I lose sight of my true being in its dark shadow.

I take pride in this great wall, and I plaster it with dust and sand lest a least hole should be left in this name; and for all the care I take I lose sight of my true being.

I came out alone on my way to my tryst. But who is this that follows me in the silent dark?

I move aside to avoid his presence but I escape him not.

He makes the dust rise from the earth with his swagger; he adds his loud voice to every word that I utter.

He is my own little self, my lord, he knows no shame; but I am ashamed to come to thy door in his company.

'Prisoner, tell me, who was it that bound you?'

'It was my master,' said the prisoner. 'I thought I could outdo everybody in the world in wealth and power, and I amassed in my own treasure-house the money due to my king. When sleep overcame me I lay upon the bed that was for my lord, and on waking up I found I was a prisoner in my own treasure-house.'

'Prisoner, tell me, who was it that wrought this unbreakable chain?'

'It was I,' said the prisoner, 'who forged this chain very carefully. I thought my invincible power would hold the world captive leaving me in a freedom undisturbed. Thus night and day I worked at the chain with huge fires and cruel hard strokes. When at last the work was done and the links were complete and unbreakable, I found that it held me in its grip.'

By all means they try to hold me secure who love me in this world. But it is otherwise with thy love which is greater than theirs, and thou keepest me free.

Lest I forget them they never venture to leave me alone. But day passes by after day and thou art not seen.

If I call not thee in my prayers, if I keep not thee in my heart, thy love for me still waits for my love.

When it was day they came into my house and said, 'We shall only take the smallest room here.'

They said, 'We shall help you in the worship of your God and humbly accept only our own share in his grace'; and then they took their seat in a corner and they sat quiet and meek.

But in the darkness of night I find they break into my sacred shrine, strong and turbulent, and snatch with unholy greed the offerings from God's altar.

Let only that little be left of me whereby I may name thee my all.

Let only that little be left of my will whereby I may feel thee on every side, and come to thee in everything, and offer to thee my love every moment.

Let only that little be left of me whereby I may never hide thee.

Let only that little of my fetters be left whereby I am bound with thy will, and thy purpose is carried out in my life--and that is the fetter of thy love.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action--

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

This is my prayer to thee, my lord--strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.

And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love.

I thought that my voyage had come to its end at the last limit of my power,--that the path before me was closed, that provisions were exhausted and the time come to take shelter in a silent obscurity.

But I find that thy will knows no end in me. And when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart; and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.

That I want thee, only thee--let my heart repeat without end. All desires that distract me, day and night, are false and empty to the core.

As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light, even thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry--'I want thee, only thee'.

As the storm still seeks its end in peace when it strikes against peace with all its might, even thus my rebellion strikes against thy love and still its cry is--'I want thee, only thee'.

When the heart is hard and parched up, come upon me with a shower of mercy.

When grace is lost from life, come with a burst of song.

When tumultuous work raises its din on all sides shutting me out from beyond, come to me, my lord of silence, with thy peace and rest.

When my beggarly heart sits crouched, shut up in a corner, break open the door, my king, and come with the ceremony of a king.

When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust, O thou holy one, thou wakeful, come with thy light and thy thunder.

The rain has held back for days and days, my God, in my arid heart. The horizon is fiercely naked--not the thinnest cover of a soft cloud, not the vaguest hint of a distant cool shower.

Send thy angry storm, dark with death, if it is thy wish, and with lashes of lightning startle the sky from end to end.

But call back, my lord, call back this pervading silent heat, still and keen and cruel, burning the heart with dire despair.

Let the cloud of grace bend low from above like the tearful look of the mother on the day of the father's wrath.

Where dost thou stand behind them all, my lover, hiding thyself in the shadows? They push thee and pass thee by on the dusty road, taking thee for naught. I wait here weary hours spreading my offerings for thee, while passers-by come and take my flowers, one by one, and my basket is nearly empty.

The morning time is past, and the noon. In the shade of evening my eyes are drowsy with sleep. Men going home glance at me and smile and fill me with shame. I sit like a beggar maid, drawing my skirt over my face, and when they ask me, what it is I want, I drop my eyes and answer them not.

Oh, how, indeed, could I tell them that for thee I wait, and that thou hast promised to come. How could I utter for shame that I keep for my dowry this poverty. Ah, I hug this pride in the secret of my heart.

I sit on the grass and gaze upon the sky and dream of the sudden

splendour of thy coming--all the lights ablaze, golden pennons flying over thy car, and they at the roadside standing agape, when they see thee come down from thy seat to raise me from the dust, and set at thy side this ragged beggar girl a-tremble with shame and pride, like a creeper in a summer breeze.

But time glides on and still no sound of the wheels of thy chariot. Many a procession passes by with noise and shouts and glamour of glory. Is it only thou who wouldst stand in the shadow silent and behind them all? And only I who would wait and weep and wear out my heart in vain longing?

Early in the day it was whispered that we should sail in a boat, only thou and I, and never a soul in the world would know of this our pilgrimage to no country and to no end.

In that shoreless ocean, at thy silently listening smile my songs would swell in melodies, free as waves, free from all bondage of words.

Is the time not come yet? Are there works still to do? Lo, the evening has come down upon the shore and in the fading light the seabirds come flying to their nests.

Who knows when the chains will be off, and the boat, like the last glimmer of sunset, vanish into the night?

The day was when I did not keep myself in readiness for thee; and entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd, unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment of my life.

And today when by chance I light upon them and see thy signature, I find they have lain scattered in the dust mixed with the memory of joys and sorrows of my trivial days forgotten.

Thou didst not turn in contempt from my childish play among dust, and the steps that I heard in my playroom are the same that are echoing from star to star.

This is my delight, thus to wait and watch at the wayside where

shadow chases light and the rain comes in the wake of the summer.

Messengers, with tidings from unknown skies, greet me and speed along the road. My heart is glad within, and the breath of the passing breeze is sweet.

From dawn till dusk I sit here before my door, and I know that of a sudden the happy moment will arrive when I shall see.

In the meanwhile I smile and I sing all alone. In the meanwhile the air is filling with the perfume of promise.

Have you not heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes.

Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes.

Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind, but all their notes have always proclaimed, 'He comes, comes, ever comes.'

In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path he comes, comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds he comes, comes, ever comes.

In sorrow after sorrow it is his steps that press upon my heart, and it is the golden touch of his feet that makes my joy to shine.

I know not from what distant time thou art ever coming nearer to meet me. Thy sun and stars can never keep thee hidden from me for aye.

In many a morning and eve thy footsteps have been heard and thy messenger has come within my heart and called me in secret.

I know not only why today my life is all astir, and a feeling of tremulous joy is passing through my heart.

It is as if the time were come to wind up my work, and I feel in

the air a faint smell of thy sweet presence.

The night is nearly spent waiting for him in vain. I fear lest in the morning he suddenly come to my door when I have fallen asleep wearied out. Oh friends, leave the way open to him--forbid him not.

If the sounds of his steps does not wake me, do not try to rouse me, I pray. I wish not to be called from my sleep by the clamorous choir of birds, by the riot of wind at the festival of morning light. Let me sleep undisturbed even if my lord comes of a sudden to my door.

Ah, my sleep, precious sleep, which only waits for his touch to vanish. Ah, my closed eyes that would open their lids only to the light of his smile when he stands before me like a dream emerging from darkness of sleep.

Let him appear before my sight as the first of all lights and all forms. The first thrill of joy to my awakened soul let it come from his glance. And let my return to myself be immediate return to him.

The morning sea of silence broke into ripples of bird songs; and the flowers were all merry by the roadside; and the wealth of gold was scattered through the rift of the clouds while we busily went on our way and paid no heed.

We sang no glad songs nor played; we went not to the village for barter; we spoke not a word nor smiled; we lingered not on the way. We quickened our pace more and more as the time sped by.

The sun rose to the mid sky and doves cooed in the shade. Withered leaves danced and whirled in the hot air of noon. The shepherd boy drowsed and dreamed in the shadow of the banyan tree, and I laid myself down by the water and stretched my tired limbs on the grass.

My companions laughed at me in scorn; they held their heads high and hurried on; they never looked back nor rested; they vanished in the distant blue haze. They crossed many meadows and hills, and passed through strange, far-away countries. All honour to

you, heroic host of the interminable path! Mockery and reproach pricked me to rise, but found no response in me. I gave myself up for lost in the depth of a glad humiliation--in the shadow of a dim delight.

The repose of the sun-embroidered green gloom slowly spread over my heart. I forgot for what I had travelled, and I surrendered my mind without struggle to the maze of shadows and songs.

At last, when I woke from my slumber and opened my eyes, I saw thee standing by me, flooding my sleep with thy smile. How I had feared that the path was long and wearisome, and the struggle to reach thee was hard!

You came down from your throne and stood at my cottage door.

I was singing all alone in a corner, and the melody caught your ear. You came down and stood at my cottage door.

Masters are many in your hall, and songs are sung there at all hours. But the simple carol of this novice struck at your love. One plaintive little strain mingled with the great music of the world, and with a flower for a prize you came down and stopped at my cottage door.

I had gone a-begging from door to door in the village path, when thy golden chariot appeared in the distance like a gorgeous dream and I wondered who was this King of all kings!

My hopes rose high and methought my evil days were at an end, and I stood waiting for alms to be given unasked and for wealth scattered on all sides in the dust.

The chariot stopped where I stood. Thy glance fell on me and thou camest down with a smile. I felt that the luck of my life had come at last. Then of a sudden thou didst hold out thy right hand and say 'What hast thou to give to me?'

Ah, what a kingly jest was it to open thy palm to a beggar to beg! I was confused and stood undecided, and then from my wallet I slowly took out the least little grain of corn and gave it to thee.

But how great my surprise when at the day's end I emptied my bag on the floor to find a least little gram of gold among the poor heap. I bitterly wept and wished that I had had the heart to give thee my all.

The night darkened. Our day's works had been done. We thought that the last guest had arrived for the night and the doors in the village were all shut. Only some said the king was to come. We laughed and said 'No, it cannot be!'

It seemed there were knocks at the door and we said it was nothing but the wind. We put out the lamps and lay down to sleep. Only some said, 'It is the messenger!' We laughed and said 'No, it must be the wind!'

There came a sound in the dead of the night. We sleepily thought it was the distant thunder. The earth shook, the walls rocked, and it troubled us in our sleep. Only some said it was the sound of wheels. We said in a drowsy murmur, 'No, it must be the rumbling of clouds!'

The night was still dark when the drum sounded. The voice came 'Wake up! delay not!' We pressed our hands on our hearts and shuddered with fear. Some said, 'Lo, there is the king's flag!' We stood up on our feet and cried 'There is no time for delay!'

The king has come--but where are lights, where are wreaths? Where is the throne to seat him? Oh, shame! Oh utter shame! Where is the hall, the decorations? Someone has said, 'Vain is this cry! Greet him with empty hands, lead him into thy rooms all bare!'

Open the doors, let the conch-shells be sounded! in the depth of the night has come the king of our dark, dreary house. The thunder roars in the sky. The darkness shudders with lightning. Bring out thy tattered piece of mat and spread it in the courtyard. With the storm has come of a sudden our king of the fearful night.

I thought I should ask of thee--but I dared not--the rose wreath thou hadst on thy neck. Thus I waited for the morning, when thou

didst depart, to find a few fragments on the bed. And like a beggar I searched in the dawn only for a stray petal or two.

Ah me, what is it I find? What token left of thy love? It is no flower, no spices, no vase of perfumed water. It is thy mighty sword, flashing as a flame, heavy as a bolt of thunder. The young light of morning comes through the window and spreads itself upon thy bed. The morning bird twitters and asks, 'Woman, what hast thou got?' No, it is no flower, nor spices, nor vase of perfumed water--it is thy dreadful sword.

I sit and muse in wonder, what gift is this of thine. I can find no place to hide it. I am ashamed to wear it, frail as I am, and it hurts me when I press it to my bosom. Yet shall I bear in my heart this honour of the burden of pain, this gift of thine.

From now there shall be no fear left for me in this world, and thou shalt be victorious in all my strife. Thou hast left death for my companion and I shall crown him with my life. Thy sword is with me to cut asunder my bonds, and there shall be no fear left for me in the world.

From now I leave off all petty decorations. Lord of my heart, no more shall there be for me waiting and weeping in corners, no more coyness and sweetness of demeanour. Thou hast given me thy sword for adornment. No more doll's decorations for me!

Beautiful is thy wristlet, decked with stars and cunningly wrought in myriad-coloured jewels. But more beautiful to me thy sword with its curve of lightning like the outspread wings of the divine bird of Vishnu, perfectly poised in the angry red light of the sunset.

It quivers like the one last response of life in ecstasy of pain at the final stroke of death; it shines like the pure flame of being burning up earthly sense with one fierce flash.

Beautiful is thy wristlet, decked with starry gems; but thy sword, O lord of thunder, is wrought with uttermost beauty, terrible to behold or think of.

I asked nothing from thee; I uttered not my name to thine ear.

When thou took'st thy leave I stood silent. I was alone by the well where the shadow of the tree fell aslant, and the women had gone home with their brown earthen pitchers full to the brim. They called me and shouted, 'Come with us, the morning is wearing on to noon.' But I languidly lingered awhile lost in the midst of vague musings.

I heard not thy steps as thou camest. Thine eyes were sad when they fell on me; thy voice was tired as thou spokest low--'Ah, I am a thirsty traveller.' I started up from my day-dreams and poured water from my jar on thy joined palms. The leaves rustled overhead; the cuckoo sang from the unseen dark, and perfume of _babla_ flowers came from the bend of the road.

I stood speechless with shame when my name thou didst ask. Indeed, what had I done for thee to keep me in remembrance? But the memory that I could give water to thee to allay thy thirst will cling to my heart and enfold it in sweetness. The morning hour is late, the bird sings in weary notes, _neem_ leaves rustle overhead and I sit and think and think.

Languor is upon your heart and the slumber is still on your eyes.

Has not the word come to you that the flower is reigning in splendour among thorns? Wake, oh awaken! let not the time pass in vain!

At the end of the stony path, in the country of virgin solitude, my friend is sitting all alone. Deceive him not. Wake, oh awaken!

What if the sky pants and trembles with the heat of the midday sun--what if the burning sand spreads its mantle of thirst--

Is there no joy in the deep of your heart? At every footfall of yours, will not the harp of the road break out in sweet music of pain?

Thus it is that thy joy in me is so full. Thus it is that thou hast come down to me. O thou lord of all heavens, where would be thy love if I were not?

Thou hast taken me as thy partner of all this wealth. In my heart is the endless play of thy delight. In my life thy will is ever taking shape.

And for this, thou who art the King of kings hast decked thyself in beauty to captivate my heart. And for this thy love loses itself in the love of thy lover, and there art thou seen in the perfect union of two.

Light, my light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light!

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre of my life; the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love; the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth.

The butterflies spread their sails on the sea of light. Lilies and jasmines surge up on the crest of the waves of light.

The light is shattered into gold on every cloud, my darling, and it scatters gems in profusion.

Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my darling, and gladness without measure. The heaven's river has drowned its banks and the flood of joy is abroad.

Let all the strains of joy mingle in my last song--the joy that makes the earth flow over in the riotous excess of the grass, the joy that sets the twin brothers, life and death, dancing over the wide world, the joy that sweeps in with the tempest, shaking and waking all life with laughter, the joy that sits still with its tears on the open red lotus of pain, and the joy that throws everything it has upon the dust, and knows not a word.

Yes, I know, this is nothing but thy love, O beloved of my heart--this golden light that dances upon the leaves, these idle clouds sailing across the sky, this passing breeze leaving its coolness upon my forehead.

The morning light has flooded my eyes--this is thy message to my heart. Thy face is bent from above, thy eyes look down on my

eyes, and my heart has touched thy feet.

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances.

They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of worlds.

They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. they seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.

The sea surges up with laughter and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach. Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle. The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach.

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play. On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children.

The sleep that flits on baby's eyes--does anybody know from where it comes? Yes, there is a rumour that it has its dwelling there, in the fairy village among shadows of the forest dimly lit with glow-worms, there hang two timid buds of enchantment. From there it comes to kiss baby's eyes.

The smile that flickers on baby's lips when he sleeps--does anybody know where it was born? Yes, there is a rumour that a young pale beam of a crescent moon touched the edge of a vanishing autumn cloud, and there the smile was first born in the dream of a dew-washed morning--the smile that flickers on baby's lips when he sleeps.

The sweet, soft freshness that blooms on baby's limbs--does

anybody know where it was hidden so long? Yes, when the mother was a young girl it lay pervading her heart in tender and silent mystery of love--the sweet, soft freshness that has bloomed on baby's limbs.

When I bring to you coloured toys, my child, I understand why there is such a play of colours on clouds, on water, and why flowers are painted in tints--when I give coloured toys to you, my child.

When I sing to make you dance I truly now why there is music in leaves, and why waves send their chorus of voices to the heart of the listening earth--when I sing to make you dance.

When I bring sweet things to your greedy hands I know why there is honey in the cup of the flowers and why fruits are secretly filled with sweet juice--when I bring sweet things to your greedy hands.

When I kiss your face to make you smile, my darling, I surely understand what pleasure streams from the sky in morning light, and what delight that is that is which the summer breeze brings to my body--when I kiss you to make you smile.

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not. Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.

I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter; I forget that there abides the old in the new, and that there also thou abidest.

Through birth and death, in this world or in others, wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the same, the one companion of my endless life who ever linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar.

When one knows thee, then alien there is none, then no door is shut. Oh, grant me my prayer that I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the play of many.

On the slope of the desolate river among tall grasses I asked her, 'Maiden, where do you go shading your lamp with your mantle? My house is all dark and lonesome--lend me your light!' she raised her dark eyes for a moment and looked at my face through the dusk. 'I have come to the river,' she said, 'to float my lamp on the stream when the daylight wanes in the west.' I stood alone among tall grasses and watched the timid flame of her lamp uselessly drifting in the tide.

In the silence of gathering night I asked her, 'Maiden, your lights are all lit--then where do you go with your lamp? My house is all dark and lonesome--lend me your light.' She raised her dark eyes on my face and stood for a moment doubtful. 'I have come,' she said at last, 'to dedicate my lamp to the sky.' I stood and watched her light uselessly burning in the void.

In the moonless gloom of midnight I ask her, 'Maiden, what is your quest, holding the lamp near your heart? My house is all dark and lonesome--lend me your light.' She stopped for a minute and thought and gazed at my face in the dark. 'I have brought my light,' she said, 'to join the carnival of lamps.' I stood and watched her little lamp uselessly lost among lights.

What divine drink wouldst thou have, my God, from this overflowing cup of my life?

My poet, is it thy delight to see thy creation through my eyes and to stand at the portals of my ears silently to listen to thine own eternal harmony?

Thy world is weaving words in my mind and thy joy is adding music to them. Thou givest thyself to me in love and then feelest thine own entire sweetness in me.

She who ever had remained in the depth of my being, in the twilight of gleams and of glimpses; she who never opened her veils in the morning light, will be my last gift to thee, my God, folded in my final song.

Words have wooed yet failed to win her; persuasion has stretched to her its eager arms in vain.

I have roamed from country to country keeping her in the core of my heart, and around her have risen and fallen the growth and decay of my life.

Over my thoughts and actions, my slumbers and dreams, she reigned yet dwelled alone and apart.

Many a man knocked at my door and asked for her and turned away in despair.

There was none in the world who ever saw her face to face, and she remained in her loneliness waiting for thy recognition.

Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well.

O thou beautiful, there in the nest is thy love that encloses the soul with colours and sounds and odours.

There comes the morning with the golden basket in her right hand bearing the wreath of beauty, silently to crown the earth.

And there comes the evening over the lonely meadows deserted by herds, through trackless paths, carrying cool draughts of peace in her golden pitcher from the western ocean of rest.

But there, where spreads the infinite sky for the soul to take her flight in, reigns the stainless white radiance. There is no day nor night, nor form nor colour, and never, never a word.

Thy sunbeam comes upon this earth of mine with arms outstretched and stands at my door the livelong day to carry back to thy feet clouds made of my tears and sighs and songs.

With fond delight thou wrappest about thy starry breast that mantle of misty cloud, turning it into numberless shapes and folds and colouring it with hues everchanging.

It is so light and so fleeting, tender and tearful and dark, that is why thou lovest it, O thou spotless and serene. And that is why it may cover thy awful white light with its pathetic shadows.

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.

Is it beyond thee to be glad with the gladness of this rhythm? to be tossed and lost and broken in the whirl of this fearful joy?

All things rush on, they stop not, they look not behind, no power can hold them back, they rush on.

Keeping steps with that restless, rapid music, seasons come dancing and pass away--colours, tunes, and perfumes pour in endless cascades in the abounding joy that scatters and gives up and dies every moment.

That I should make much of myself and turn it on all sides, thus casting coloured shadows on thy radiance--such is thy _maya_.

Thou settest a barrier in thine own being and then callest thy severed self in myriad notes. This thy self-separation has taken body in me.

The poignant song is echoed through all the sky in many-coloured tears and smiles, alarms and hopes; waves rise up and sink again, dreams break and form. In me is thy own defeat of self.

This screen that thou hast raised is painted with innumerable figures with the brush of the night and the day. Behind it thy seat is woven in wondrous mysteries of curves, casting away all barren lines of straightness.

The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.

He it is, the innermost one, who awakens my being with his deep hidden touches.

He it is who puts his enchantment upon these eyes and joyfully plays on the chords of my heart in varied cadence of pleasure and pain.

He it is who weaves the web of this _maya_ in evanescent hues of gold and silver, blue and green, and lets peep out through the folds his feet, at whose touch I forget myself.

Days come and ages pass, and it is ever he who moves my heart in many a name, in many a guise, in many a rapture of joy and of sorrow.

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.

Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim.

My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame and place them before the altar of thy temple.

No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.

Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love.

The day is no more, the shadow is upon the earth. It is time that I go to the stream to fill my pitcher.

The evening air is eager with the sad music of the water. Ah, it calls me out into the dusk. In the lonely lane there is no passer-by, the wind is up, the ripples are rampant in the river.

I know not if I shall come back home. I know not whom I shall chance to meet. There at the fording in the little boat the unknown man plays upon his lute.

Thy gifts to us mortals fulfil all our needs and yet run back to thee undiminished.

The river has its everyday work to do and hastens through fields and hamlets; yet its incessant stream winds towards the washing of thy feet.

The flower sweetens the air with its perfume; yet its last service is to offer itself to thee.

Thy worship does not impoverish the world.

From the words of the poet men take what meanings please them; yet their last meaning points to thee.

Day after day, O lord of my life, shall I stand before thee face to face. With folded hands, O lord of all worlds, shall I stand before thee face to face.

Under thy great sky in solitude and silence, with humble heart shall I stand before thee face to face.

In this laborious world of thine, tumultuous with toil and with struggle, among hurrying crowds shall I stand before thee face to face.

And when my work shall be done in this world, O King of kings, alone and speechless shall I stand before thee face to face.

I know thee as my God and stand apart--I do not know thee as my own and come closer. I know thee as my father and bow before thy feet--I do not grasp thy hand as my friend's.

I stand not where thou comest down and ownest thyself as mine, there to clasp thee to my heart and take thee as my comrade.

Thou art the Brother amongst my brothers, but I heed them not, I divide not my earnings with them, thus sharing my all with thee.

In pleasure and in pain I stand not by the side of men, and thus stand by thee. I shrink to give up my life, and thus do not plunge into the great waters of life.

When the creation was new and all the stars shone in their first splendour, the gods held their assembly in the sky and sang 'Oh, the picture of perfection! the joy unalloyed!'

But one cried of a sudden--'It seems that somewhere there is a break in the chain of light and one of the stars has been lost.'

The golden string of their harp snapped, their song stopped, and they cried in dismay--'Yes, that lost star was the best, she was the glory of all heavens!'

From that day the search is unceasing for her, and the cry goes on from one to the other that in her the world has lost its one joy!

Only in the deepest silence of night the stars smile and whisper among themselves--'Vain is this seeking! unbroken perfection is over all!'

If it is not my portion to meet thee in this life then let me ever feel that I have missed thy sight--let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours.

As my days pass in the crowded market of this world and my hands grow full with the daily profits, let me ever feel that I have gained nothing--let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours.

When I sit by the roadside, tired and panting, when I spread my bed low in the dust, let me ever feel that the long journey is still before me--let me not forget a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours.

When my rooms have been decked out and the flutes sound and the

laughter there is loud, let me ever feel that I have not invited thee to my house--let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours.

I am like a remnant of a cloud of autumn uselessly roaming in the sky, O my sun ever-glorious! Thy touch has not yet melted my vapour, making me one with thy light, and thus I count months and years separated from thee.

If this be thy wish and if this be thy play, then take this fleeting emptiness of mine, paint it with colours, gild it with gold, float it on the wanton wind and spread it in varied wonders.

And again when it shall be thy wish to end this play at night, I shall melt and vanish away in the dark, or it may be in a smile of the white morning, in a coolness of purity transparent.

On many an idle day have I grieved over lost time. But it is never lost, my lord. Thou hast taken every moment of my life in thine own hands.

Hidden in the heart of things thou art nourishing seeds into sprouts, buds into blossoms, and ripening flowers into fruitfulness.

I was tired and sleeping on my idle bed and imagined all work had ceased. In the morning I woke up and found my garden full with wonders of flowers.

Time is endless in thy hands, my lord. There is none to count thy minutes.

Days and nights pass and ages bloom and fade like flowers. Thou knowest how to wait.

Thy centuries follow each other perfecting a small wild flower.

We have no time to lose, and having no time we must scramble for a chances. We are too poor to be late.

And thus it is that time goes by while I give it to every querulous man who claims it, and thine altar is empty of all offerings to the last.

At the end of the day I hasten in fear lest thy gate to be shut; but I find that yet there is time.

Mother, I shall weave a chain of pearls for thy neck with my tears of sorrow.

The stars have wrought their anklets of light to deck thy feet, but mine will hang upon thy breast.

Wealth and fame come from thee and it is for thee to give or to withhold them. But this my sorrow is absolutely mine own, and when I bring it to thee as my offering thou rewardest me with thy grace.

It is the pang of separation that spreads throughout the world and gives birth to shapes innumerable in the infinite sky.

It is this sorrow of separation that gazes in silence all nights from star to star and becomes lyric among rustling leaves in rainy darkness of July.

It is this overspreading pain that deepens into loves and desires, into sufferings and joy in human homes; and this it is that ever melts and flows in songs through my poet's heart.

When the warriors came out first from their master's hall, where had they hid their power? Where were their armour and their arms?

They looked poor and helpless, and the arrows were showered upon them on the day they came out from their master's hall.

When the warriors marched back again to their master's hall where did they hide their power?

They had dropped the sword and dropped the bow and the arrow; peace was on their foreheads, and they had left the fruits of

their life behind them on the day they marched back again to their master's hall.

Death, thy servant, is at my door. He has crossed the unknown sea and brought thy call to my home.

The night is dark and my heart is fearful--yet I will take up the lamp, open my gates and bow to him my welcome. It is thy messenger who stands at my door.

I will worship him placing at his feet the treasure of my heart.

He will go back with his errand done, leaving a dark shadow on my morning; and in my desolate home only my forlorn self will remain as my last offering to thee.

In desperate hope I go and search for her in all the corners of my room; I find her not.

My house is small and what once has gone from it can never be regained.

But infinite is thy mansion, my lord, and seeking her I have to come to thy door.

I stand under the golden canopy of thine evening sky and I lift my eager eyes to thy face.

I have come to the brink of eternity from which nothing can vanish--no hope, no happiness, no vision of a face seen through tears.

Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean, plunge it into the deepest fullness. Let me for once feel that lost sweet touch in the allness of the universe.

Deity of the ruined temple! The broken strings of _Vina_ sing no more your praise. The bells in the evening proclaim not your time of worship. The air is still and silent about you.

In your desolate dwelling comes the vagrant spring breeze. It

brings the tidings of flowers--the flowers that for your worship are offered no more.

Your worshipper of old wanders ever longing for favour still refused. In the eventide, when fires and shadows mingle with the gloom of dust, he wearily comes back to the ruined temple with hunger in his heart.

Many a festival day comes to you in silence, deity of the ruined temple. Many a night of worship goes away with lamp unlit.

Many new images are built by masters of cunning art and carried to the holy stream of oblivion when their time is come.

Only the deity of the ruined temple remains unworshipped in deathless neglect.

No more noisy, loud words from me--such is my master's will. Henceforth I deal in whispers. The speech of my heart will be carried on in murmurings of a song.

Men hasten to the King's market. All the buyers and sellers are there. But I have my untimely leave in the middle of the day, in the thick of work.

Let then the flowers come out in my garden, though it is not their time; and let the midday bees strike up their lazy hum.

Full many an hour have I spent in the strife of the good and the evil, but now it is the pleasure of my playmate of the empty days to draw my heart on to him; and I know not why is this sudden call to what useless inconsequence!

On the day when death will knock at thy door what wilt thou offer to him?

Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life--I will never let him go with empty hands.

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life will I place before him at the close of my days when death will knock at my

door.

O thou the last fulfilment of life, Death, my death, come and whisper to me!

Day after day I have kept watch for thee; for thee have I borne the joys and pangs of life.

All that I am, that I have, that I hope and all my love have ever flowed towards thee in depth of secrecy. One final glance from thine eyes and my life will be ever thine own.

The flowers have been woven and the garland is ready for the bridegroom. After the wedding the bride shall leave her home and meet her lord alone in the solitude of night.

I know that the day will come when my sight of this earth shall be lost, and life will take its leave in silence, drawing the last curtain over my eyes.

Yet stars will watch at night, and morning rise as before, and hours heave like sea waves casting up pleasures and pains.

When I think of this end of my moments, the barrier of the moments breaks and I see by the light of death thy world with its careless treasures. Rare is its lowliest seat, rare is its meanest of lives.

Things that I longed for in vain and things that I got--let them pass. Let me but truly possess the things that I ever spurned and overlooked.

I have got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers! I bow to you all and take my departure.

Here I give back the keys of my door--and I give up all claims to my house. I only ask for last kind words from you.

We were neighbours for long, but I received more than I could give. Now the day has dawned and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out. A summons has come and I am ready for my journey.

At this time of my parting, wish me good luck, my friends! The sky is flushed with the dawn and my path lies beautiful.

Ask not what I have with me to take there. I start on my journey with empty hands and expectant heart.

I shall put on my wedding garland. Mine is not the red-brown dress of the traveller, and though there are dangers on the way I have no fear in mind.

The evening star will come out when my voyage is done and the plaintive notes of the twilight melodies be struck up from the King's gateway.

I was not aware of the moment when I first crossed the threshold of this life.

What was the power that made me open out into this vast mystery like a bud in the forest at midnight!

When in the morning I looked upon the light I felt in a moment that I was no stranger in this world, that the inscrutable without name and form had taken me in its arms in the form of my own mother.

Even so, in death the same unknown will appear as ever known to me. And because I love this life, I know I shall love death as well.

The child cries out when from the right breast the mother takes it away, in the very next moment to find in the left one its consolation.

When I go from hence let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.

I have tasted of the hidden honey of this lotus that expands on the ocean of light, and thus am I blessed--let this be my parting word.

In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play and here have I caught sight of him that is formless.

My whole body and my limbs have thrilled with his touch who is beyond touch; and if the end comes here, let it come--let this be my parting word.

When my play was with thee I never questioned who thou wert. I knew nor shyness nor fear, my life was boisterous.

In the early morning thou wouldst call me from my sleep like my own comrade and lead me running from glade to glade.

On those days I never cared to know the meaning of songs thou sangest to me. Only my voice took up the tunes, and my heart danced in their cadence.

Now, when the playtime is over, what is this sudden sight that is come upon me? The world with eyes bent upon thy feet stands in awe with all its silent stars.

I will deck thee with trophies, garlands of my defeat. It is never in my power to escape unconquered.

I surely know my pride will go to the wall, my life will burst its bonds in exceeding pain, and my empty heart will sob out in music like a hollow reed, and the stone will melt in tears.

I surely know the hundred petals of a lotus will not remain closed for ever and the secret recess of its honey will be bared.

From the blue sky an eye shall gaze upon me and summon me in silence. Nothing will be left for me, nothing whatever, and utter death shall I receive at thy feet.

When I give up the helm I know that the time has come for thee to take it. What there is to do will be instantly done. Vain is this struggle.

Then take away your hands and silently put up with your defeat, my heart, and think it your good fortune to sit perfectly still

where you are placed.

These my lamps are blown out at every little puff of wind, and trying to light them I forget all else again and again.

But I shall be wise this time and wait in the dark, spreading my mat on the floor; and whenever it is thy pleasure, my lord, come silently and take thy seat here.

I dive down into the depth of the ocean of forms, hoping to gain the perfect pearl of the formless.

No more sailing from harbour to harbour with this my weather-beaten boat. The days are long passed when my sport was to be tossed on waves.

And now I am eager to die into the deathless.

Into the audience hall by the fathomless abyss where swells up the music of toneless strings I shall take this harp of my life.

I shall tune it to the notes of forever, and when it has sobbed out its last utterance, lay down my silent harp at the feet of the silent.

Ever in my life have I sought thee with my songs. It was they who led me from door to door, and with them have I felt about me, searching and touching my world.

It was my songs that taught me all the lessons I ever learnt; they showed me secret paths, they brought before my sight many a star on the horizon of my heart.

They guided me all the day long to the mysteries of the country of pleasure and pain, and, at last, to what palace gate have the brought me in the evening at the end of my journey?

I boasted among men that I had known you. They see your pictures in all works of mine. They come and ask me, 'Who is he?' I know not how to answer them. I say, 'Indeed, I cannot tell.' They blame me and they go away in scorn. And you sit there smiling.

I put my tales of you into lasting songs. The secret gushes out from my heart. They come and ask me, 'Tell me all your meanings.' I know not how to answer them. I say, 'Ah, who knows what they mean!' They smile and go away in utter scorn. And you sit there smiling.

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet.

Like a rain-cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.

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Classic Poetry Series

Rabindranath Tagore

- poems -

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A Moments Indulgence

I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side. The works
that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.

Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor respite,
and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil.

Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and
the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove.

Now it is time to sit quite, face to face with thee, and to sing
dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure.

Rabindranath Tagore

Authorship

You say that father write a lot of books, but what he write I don't understand.
He was reading to you all the evening, but could you really make out what he meant?
What nice stores, mother, you can tell us! Why can't father write like that, I wonder?
Did he never hear from his own mother stories of giants and fairies and princesses?
Has he forgotten them all?
Often when he gets late for his bath you have to and call him an hundred times.
You wait and keep his dishes warm for him, but he goes on writing and forgets.
Father always plays at making books.
If ever I go to play in father's room, you come and call me, "What a naughty child!"
If I make the slightest noise you say, "Don't you see that father's at his work?"
What's the fun of always writing and writing?
When I take up father's pen or pencil and write upon his book just as he does,-a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i,-why do you get cross with me then, mother?
You never say a word when father writes.
When my father wastes such heaps of paper, mother, you don't seem to mind at all.
But if I take only one sheet to take a boat with, you say, "Child, how troublesome you are!"
What do you think of father's spoiling sheets and sheets of paper with black marks all over both sides?

Rabindranath Tagore

Baby's Way

If baby only wanted to, he could fly up to heaven this moment.
It is not for nothing that he does not leave us.
He loves to rest his head on mother's bosom, and cannot ever bear to lose sight of her.
Baby know all manner of wise words, though few on earth can understand their meaning.
It is not for nothing that he never wants to speak.
The one thing he wants is to learn mother's words from mother's lips. That is why he looks so innocent.
Baby had a heap of gold and pearls, yet he came like a beggar on to this earth.
It is not for nothing he came in such a disguise.
This dear little naked mendicant pretends to be utterly helpless, so that he may beg for mother's wealth of love.
Baby was so free from every tie in the land of the tiny crescent moon.
It was not for nothing he gave up his freedom.
He knows that there is room for endless joy in mother's little corner of a heart, and it is sweeter far than liberty to be caught and pressed in her dear arms.
Baby never knew how to cry. He dwelt in the land of perfect bliss.
It is not for nothing he has chosen to shed tears.
Though with the smile of his dear face he draws mother's yearning heart to him, yet his little cries over tiny troubles weave the double bond of pity and love.

Rabindranath Tagore

Baby's World

I wish I could take a quiet corner in the heart of my baby's very
own world.
I know it has stars that talk to him, and a sky that stoops
down to his face to amuse him with its silly clouds and rainbows.
Those who make believe to be dumb, and look as if they never
could move, come creeping to his window with their stories and with
trays crowded with bright toys.
I wish I could travel by the road that crosses baby's mind,
and out beyond all bounds;
Where messengers run errands for no cause between the kingdoms
of kings of no history;
Where Reason makes kites of her laws and flies them, the Truth
sets Fact free from its fetters.

Rabindranath Tagore

Beggarly Heart

When the heart is hard and parched up,
come upon me with a shower of mercy.

When grace is lost from life,
come with a burst of song.

When tumultuous work raises its din on all sides shutting me out from
beyond, come to me, my lord of silence, with thy peace and rest.

When my beggarly heart sits crouched, shut up in a corner,
break open the door, my king, and come with the ceremony of a king.

When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust, O thou holy one,
thou wakeful, come with thy light and thy thunder

Rabindranath Tagore

Benediction

Bless this little heart, this white soul that has won the kiss of
heaven for our earth.
He loves the light of the sun, he loves the sight of his
mother's face.
He has not learned to despise the dust, and to hanker after
gold.
Clasp him to your heart and bless him.
He has come into this land of an hundred cross-roads.
I know not how he chose you from the crowd, came to your door,
and grasped you hand to ask his way.
He will follow you, laughing the talking, and not a doubt in
his heart.
Keep his trust, lead him straight and bless him.
Lay your hand on his head, and pray that though the waves
underneath grow threatening, yet the breath from above may come and
fill his sails and waft him to the heaven of peace.
Forget him not in your hurry, let him come to your heart and
bless him.

Rabindranath Tagore

Brink Of Eternity

In desperate hope I go and search for her
in all the corners of my room;
I find her not.

My house is small
and what once has gone from it can never be regained.

But infinite is thy mansion, my lord,
and seeking her I have to come to thy door.

I stand under the golden canopy of thine evening sky
and I lift my eager eyes to thy face.

I have come to the brink of eternity from which nothing can vanish
---no hope, no happiness, no vision of a face seen through tears.

Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean,
plunge it into the deepest fullness.
Let me for once feel that lost sweet touch
in the allness of the universe.

Rabindranath Tagore

Chain Of Pearls

Mother, I shall weave a chain of pearls for thy neck
with my tears of sorrow.

The stars have wrought their anklets of light to deck thy feet,
but mine will hang upon thy breast.

Wealth and fame come from thee
and it is for thee to give or to withhold them.
But this my sorrow is absolutely mine own,
and when I bring it to thee as my offering
thou rewardest me with thy grace.

Rabindranath Tagore

Closed Path

I thought that my voyage had come to its end
at the last limit of my power,---that the path before me was closed,
that provisions were exhausted
and the time come to take shelter in a silent obscurity.

But I find that thy will knows no end in me.
And when old words die out on the tongue,
new melodies break forth from the heart;
and where the old tracks are lost,
new country is revealed with its wonders.

Rabindranath Tagore

Clouds and Waves

Mother, the folk who live up in the clouds call out to me-
"We play from the time we wake till the day ends.
We play with the golden dawn, we play with the silver moon."
I ask, "But how am I to get up to you ?"
They answer, "Come to the edge of the earth, lift up your hands to the sky, and you will be taken up into the clouds."
"My mother is waiting for me at home, "I say, "How can I leave her and come?"
Then they smile and float away.
But I know a nicer game than that, mother.
I shall be the cloud and you the moon.
I shall cover you with both my hands, and our house-top will be the blue sky.
The folk who live in the waves call out to me-
"We sing from morning till night; on and on we travel and know not where we pass."
I ask, "But how am I to join you?"
They tell me, "Come to the edge of the shore and stand with your eyes tight shut, and you will be carried out upon the waves."
I say, "My mother always wants me at home in the everything- how can I leave her and go?"
They smile, dance and pass by.
But I know a better game than that.
I will be the waves and you will be a strange shore.
I shall roll on and on and on, and break upon your lap with laughter.
And no one in the world will know where we both are.

Rabindranath Tagore

Colored Toys

When I bring to you colored toys, my child,
I understand why there is such a play of colors on clouds, on water,
and why flowers are painted in tints
---when I give colored toys to you, my child.

When I sing to make you dance
I truly now why there is music in leaves,
and why waves send their chorus of voices to the heart of the listening earth
---when I sing to make you dance.

When I bring sweet things to your greedy hands
I know why there is honey in the cup of the flowers
and why fruits are secretly filled with sweet juice
---when I bring sweet things to your greedy hands.

When I kiss your face to make you smile, my darling,
I surely understand what pleasure streams from the sky in morning light,
and what delight that is that is which the summer breeze brings to my body
---when I kiss you to make you smile.

Rabindranath Tagore

Death

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Rabindranath Tagore

Defamation

Whey are those tears in your eyes, my child?
How horrid of them to be always scolding you for nothing!
You have stained your fingers and face with ink while writing-is that why they call you dirty?
O, fie! Would they dare to call the full moon dirty because it has smudged its face with ink?
For every little trifle they blame you, my child. They are ready to find fault for nothing.
You tore your clothes while playing-is that why they call you untidy?
O, fie! What would they call an autumn morning that smiles through its ragged clouds?
Take no heed of what they say to you, my child.
They make a long list of your misdeeds.
Everybody knows how you love sweet things-is that why they call you greedy?
O, fie! What then would they call us who love you?

Rabindranath Tagore

Distant Time

I know not from what distant time
thou art ever coming nearer to meet me.
Thy sun and stars can never keep thee hidden from me for aye.

In many a morning and eve thy footsteps have been heard
and thy messenger has come within my heart and called me in secret.

I know not only why today my life is all astir,
and a feeling of tremulous joy is passing through my heart.

It is as if the time were come to wind up my work,
and I feel in the air a faint smell of thy sweet presence.

Rabindranath Tagore

Dungeon

He whom I enclose with my name is weeping in this dungeon.
I am ever busy building this wall all around; and as this wall goes up into
the sky day by day I lose sight of my true being in its dark shadow.

I take pride in this great wall, and I plaster it with dust and sand
lest a least hole should be left in this name;
and for all the care I take I lose sight of my true being.

Rabindranath Tagore

Endless Time

Time is endless in thy hands, my lord.
There is none to count thy minutes.

Days and nights pass and ages bloom and fade like flowers.
Thou knowest how to wait.

Thy centuries follow each other perfecting a small wild flower.

We have no time to lose,
and having no time we must scramble for a chance.
We are too poor to be late.

And thus it is that time goes by
while I give it to every querulous man who claims it,
and thine altar is empty of all offerings to the last.

At the end of the day I hasten in fear lest thy gate be shut;
but I find that yet there is time.

Rabindranath Tagore

Face To Face

Day after day, O lord of my life,
shall I stand before thee face to face.
With folded hands, O lord of all worlds,
shall I stand before thee face to face.

Under thy great sky in solitude and silence,
with humble heart shall I stand before thee face to face.

In this laborious world of thine, tumultuous with toil
and with struggle, among hurrying crowds
shall I stand before thee face to face.

And when my work shall be done in this world,
O King of kings, alone and speechless
shall I stand before thee face to face.

Rabindranath Tagore

Fairyland

If people came to know where my king's palace is, it would vanish
into the air.
The walls are of white silver and the roof of shining gold.
The queen lives in a palace with seven courtyards, and she
wears a jewel that cost all the wealth of seven kingdoms.
But let me tell you, mother, in a whisper, where my king's
palace is.
It is at the corner of our terrace where the pot of the tulsi
plant stands.
The princess lies sleeping on the far-away shore of the seven
impassable seas.
There is none in the world who can find her but myself.
She has bracelets on her arms and pearl drops in her ears; her
hair sweeps down upon the floor.
She will wake when I touch her with my magic wand and jewels
will fall from her lips when she smiles.
But let me whisper in your ear, mother; she is there in the
corner of our terrace where the pot of the tulsi plant stands.
When it is time for you to go to the river for your bath, step
up to that terrace on the roof.
I sit in the corner where the shadow of the walls meet
together.
Only puss is allowed to come with me, for she know where the
barber in the story lives.
But let me whisper, mother, in your ear where the barber in
the story lives.
It is at the corner of the terrace where the pot of the tulsi
plant stands.

Rabindranath Tagore

Farewell

I have got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers!
I bow to you all and take my departure.

Here I give back the keys of my door
---and I give up all claims to my house.
I only ask for last kind words from you.

We were neighbors for long,
but I received more than I could give.
Now the day has dawned
and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out.
A summons has come and I am ready for my journey.

Rabindranath Tagore

Flower

Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! I fear lest it
droop and drop into the dust.

I may not find a place in thy garland, but honour it with a touch of
pain from thy hand and pluck it. I fear lest the day end before I am
aware, and the time of offering go by.

Though its colour be not deep and its smell be faint, use this flower
in thy service and pluck it while there is time.

Rabindranath Tagore

Fool

O Fool, try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders!
O beggar, to come beg at thy own door!

Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all,
and never look behind in regret.

Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath.
It is unholy---take not thy gifts through its unclean hands.
Accept only what is offered by sacred love.

Rabindranath Tagore

Free Love

By all means they try to hold me secure who love me in this world.
But it is otherwise with thy love which is greater than theirs,
and thou keepest me free.

Lest I forget them they never venture to leave me alone.
But day passes by after day and thou art not seen.

If I call not thee in my prayers, if I keep not thee in my heart,
thy love for me still waits for my love.

Rabindranath Tagore

Friend

Art thou abroad on this stormy night
on thy journey of love, my friend?
The sky groans like one in despair.

I have no sleep tonight.
Ever and again I open my door and look out on
the darkness, my friend!

I can see nothing before me.
I wonder where lies thy path!

By what dim shore of the ink-black river,
by what far edge of the frowning forest,
through what mazy depth of gloom art thou threading
thy course to come to me, my friend?

Rabindranath Tagore

Give Me Strength

This is my prayer to thee, my lord---strike,
strike at the root of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.

And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love.

Rabindranath Tagore

Innermost One

He it is, the innermost one,
who awakens my being with his deep hidden touches.

He it is who puts his enchantment upon these eyes
and joyfully plays on the chords of my heart
in varied cadence of pleasure and pain.

He it is who weaves the web of this maya
in evanescent hues of gold and silver, blue and green,
and lets peep out through the folds his feet,
at whose touch I forget myself.

Days come and ages pass,
and it is ever he who moves my heart in many a name,
in many a guise, in many a rapture of joy and of sorrow.

Rabindranath Tagore

Journey Home

The time that my journey takes is long and the way of it long.

I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light, and pursued my
voyage through the wildernesses of worlds leaving my track on many a star and planet.

It is the most distant course that comes nearest to thyself,
and that training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune.

The traveler has to knock at every alien door to come to his own,
and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end.

My eyes strayed far and wide before I shut them and said `Here art thou!'

The question and the cry `Oh, where?' melt into tears of a thousand
streams and deluge the world with the flood of the assurance `I am!'

Rabindranath Tagore

Lamp Of Love

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitiation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Rabindranath Tagore

Last Curtain

I know that the day will come
when my sight of this earth shall be lost,
and life will take its leave in silence,
drawing the last curtain over my eyes.

Yet stars will watch at night,
and morning rise as before,
and hours heave like sea waves casting up pleasures and pains.

When I think of this end of my moments,
the barrier of the moments breaks
and I see by the light of death
thy world with its careless treasures.
Rare is its lowliest seat,
rare is its meanest of lives.

Things that I longed for in vain
and things that I got
---let them pass.
Let me but truly possess
the things that I ever spurned
and overlooked.

Rabindranath Tagore

Leave This

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!
Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?
Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground
and where the pathmaker is breaking stones.
He is with them in sun and in shower,
and his garment is covered with dust.
Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!

Deliverance?
Where is this deliverance to be found?
Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation;
he is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense!
What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained?
Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.

Rabindranath Tagore

Let Me Not Forget

If it is not my portion to meet thee in this life
then let me ever feel that I have missed thy sight
---let me not forget for a moment,
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams
and in my wakeful hours.

As my days pass in the crowded market of this world
and my hands grow full with the daily profits,
let me ever feel that I have gained nothing
---let me not forget for a moment,
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams
and in my wakeful hours.

When I sit by the roadside, tired and panting,
when I spread my bed low in the dust,
let me ever feel that the long journey is still before me
---let me not forget a moment,
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams
and in my wakeful hours.

When my rooms have been decked out and the flutes sound
and the laughter there is loud,
let me ever feel that I have not invited thee to my house
---let me not forget for a moment,
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams
and in my wakeful hours

Rabindranath Tagore

Light

Light, my light, the world-filling light,
the eye-kissing light,
heart-sweetening light!

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the center of my life;
the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love;
the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth.

The butterflies spread their sails on the sea of light.
Lilies and jasmines surge up on the crest of the waves of light.

The light is shattered into gold on every cloud, my darling,
and it scatters gems in profusion.

Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my darling,
and gladness without measure.
The heaven's river has drowned its banks
and the flood of joy is abroad.

Rabindranath Tagore

Little Flute

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail
vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales,
and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in
joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine.
Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.

Rabindranath Tagore

Little Of Me

Let only that little be left of me
whereby I may name thee my all.

Let only that little be left of my will
whereby I may feel thee on every side,
and come to thee in everything,
and offer to thee my love every moment.

Let only that little be left of me
whereby I may never hide thee.
Let only that little of my fetters be left
whereby I am bound with thy will,
and thy purpose is carried out in my life---and that is the fetter of thy love.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lost Star

When the creation was new and all the stars shone in their first
splendor, the gods held their assembly in the sky and sang
`Oh, the picture of perfection! the joy unalloyed!'

But one cried of a sudden
---`It seems that somewhere there is a break in the chain of light
and one of the stars has been lost.'

The golden string of their harp snapped,
their song stopped, and they cried in dismay
---`Yes, that lost star was the best,
she was the glory of all heavens!'

From that day the search is unceasing for her,
and the cry goes on from one to the other
that in her the world has lost its one joy!

Only in the deepest silence of night the stars smile
and whisper among themselves
---`Vain is this seeking! unbroken perfection is over all!'

Rabindranath Tagore

Lost Time

On many an idle day have I grieved over lost time.
But it is never lost, my lord.
Thou hast taken every moment of my life in thine own hands.

Hidden in the heart of things thou art nourishing seeds into sprouts,
buds into blossoms, and ripening flowers into fruitfulness.

I was tired and sleeping on my idle bed
and imagined all work had ceased.
In the morning I woke up
and found my garden full with wonders of flowers.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lotus

On the day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my mind was straying,
and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded.

Only now and again a sadness fell upon me, and I started up from my
dream and felt a sweet trace of a strange fragrance in the south wind.

That vague sweetness made my heart ache with longing and it seemed to
me that is was the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion.

I knew not then that it was so near, that it was mine, and that this
perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts II: Come to My Garden Walk

Come to my garden walk, my love. Pass by the fervid flowers that press themselves on your sight. Pass them by, stopping at some chance joy, which like a sudden wonder of sunset illumines, yet elude.

For lover's gift is shy, it never tells its name, it flits across the shade, spreading a shiver of joy along the dust.

Overtake it or miss it for ever. But a gift that can be grasped is merely a frail flower, or a lamp with flame that will flicker.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts IV: She Is Near to My Heart

She is near to my heart as the meadow-flower to the earth; she is sweet to me as sleep is to tired limbs. My love for her is my life flowing in its fullness, like a river in autumn flood, running with serene abandonment. My songs are one with my love, like the murmur of a stream, that sings with all its waves and current.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts LII: Tired of Waiting

Tired of waiting, you burst your bonds, impatient flowers, before the winter had gone. Glimpses of the unseen comer reached your wayside watch, and you rushed out running and panting, impulsive jasmines, troops of riotous roses.

You were the first to march to the breach of death, your clamour of colour and perfume troubled the air. You laughed and pressed and pushed each other, bared your breast and dropped in heaps.

The Summer will come in its time, sailing in the flood-tide of the south wind. But you never counted slow moments to be sure of him. You recklessly spent your all in the road, in the terrible joy of faith.

You heard his footsteps from afar, and flung your mantle of death for him to tread upon. Your bonds break even before the rescuer is seen, you make him your own ere he can come and claim you.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts LIV: In the Beginning of Time

In the beginning of time, there rose from the churning of God's dream two women. One is the dancer at the court of paradise, the desired of men, she who laughs and plucks the minds of the wise from their cold meditations and of fools from their emptiness; and scatters them like seeds with careless hands in the extravagant winds of March, in the flowering frenzy of May.

The other is the crowned queen of heaven, the mother, throned on the fullness of golden autumn; she who in the harvest-time brings straying hearts to the smile sweet as tears, the beauty deep as the sea of silence, -brings them to the temple of the Unknown, at the holy confluence of Life and Death.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts LVI: The Evening Was Lonely

The evening was lonely for me, and I was reading a book till my heart became dry, and it seemed to me that beauty was a thing fashioned by the traders in words. Tired I shut the book and snuffed the candle. In a moment the room was flooded with moonlight.

Spirit of Beauty, how could you, whose radiance overbrims the sky, stand hidden behind a candle's tiny flame? How could a few vain words from a book rise like a mist, and veil her whose voice has hushed the heart of earth into ineffable calm?

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts LVIII: Things Throng and Laugh

Things throng and laugh loud in the sky; the sands and dust dance and whirl like children. Man's mind is aroused by their shouts; his thoughts long to be the playmates of things.

Our dreams, drifting in the stream of the vague, stretch their arms to clutch the earth, -their efforts stiffen into bricks and stones, and thus the city of man is built.

Voices come swarming from the past,-seeking answers from the living moments. Beats of their wings fill the air with tremulous shadows, and sleepless thoughts in our minds leave their nests to take flight across the desert of dimness, in the passionate thirst for forms. They are lampless pilgrims, seeking the shore of light, to find themselves in things. They will be lured into poets's rhymes, they will be housed in the towers of the town not yet planned, they have their call to arms from the battle fields of the future, they are bidden to join hands in the strife of peace yet to come.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts LXX: Take Back Your Coins

Take back your coins, King's Councillor. I am of those women you sent to the forest shrine to decoy the young ascetic who had never seen a women. I failed in your bidding.

Dimly day was breaking when the hermit boy came to bathe in the stream, his tawny locks crowded on his shoulders, like a cluster of morning clouds, and his limbs shining like a streak of sunbeam. We laughed and sang as we rowed in our boat; we jumped into the river in a mad frolic, and danced around him, when the sun rose staring at us from the water's edge in a flush of divine anger.

Like a child-god, the boy opened his eyes and watched our movements, the wonder deepening till his eyes shone like morning stars. He lifted his clasped hands and chanted a hymn of praise in his bird-like young voice, thrilling every leaf of the forest. Never such words were sung to a mortal woman before; they were like the silent hymn to the dawn which rises from the hushed hills. THe women hid their mouths with their hands, their bodies swaying with laughter, and a spasm of doubt ran across his face. Quickly came I to his side, sorely pained, and, bowing to his feet, I said, "Lord, accept my service."

I led him to the grassy bank, wiped his body with the end of my silken mantle, and, kneeling on the ground, I dried his feet with my trailing hair. When I raised my face and looked into his eyes, I thought I felt the world's first kiss to the first woman, -Blessed am I, blessed is God, who made me a woman. I heard him say to me, "What God unknown are you? YOur touch is the touch of the Immortal, your eyes have the mystery of the midnight."

Ah, no, not that smile, King's Councillor, -the dust of worldly wisdom has covered your sight, old man. But this boy's innocence pierced the mist and saw the shining truth, the woman divine....

The women clapped their hands, and laughed their obscene laugh, and with veils dragged on the dust and hair hanging loose they began to pelt him with flowers.

Alas, my spotless sun, could not my shame weave fiery mist to cover you in its folds? I fell at his feet and cried, "Forgive me. " I fled like a stricken deer through shade and sun, and cried as I fled, " Forgive me. " The women's foul laughter pressed me like a cracking fire, but the words ever rang in my ears, " What God unknown are you?"

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts V: I Would Ask For Still More

I would ask for still more, if I had the sky with all its stars,
and the world with its endless riches; but I would be content with
the smallest corner of this earth if only she were mine.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts VIII: There Is Room for You

There is room for you. You are alone with your few sheaves of rice.
My boat is crowded, it is heavily laden, but how can I turn you
away? Your young body is slim and swaying; there is a twinkling
smile in the edge of your eyes, and your robe is coloured like the
rain cloud.
    The travellers will land for different roads and homes. You
will sit for a while on the prow of my boat, and at the journey's
end none will keep you back.
    Where do you go, and to what home, to garner your sheaves? I
will not question you, but when I fold my sails and moor my boat
I shall sit and wonder in the evening, -Where do you go, and to
what home, to garner your sheaves?

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XIII: Last Night in the Garden

Last night in the garden I offered you my youth's foaming wine. You lifted the cup to your lips, you shut your eyes and smiled while I raised your veil, unbound your tresses, drawing down upon my breast your face sweet with its silence, last night when the moon's dream overflowed the world of slumber.

To-day in the dew-cooled calm of the dawn you are walking to God's temple, bathed and robed in white, with a basketful of flowers in your hand. I stand aside in the shade under the tree, with my head bent, in the calm of the dawn by the lonely road to the temple.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XIX: It Is Written in the Book

It is written in the book that Man, when fifty, must leave the noisy world, to go to the forest seclusion. But the poet proclaims that the forest hermitage is only for the young. For it is the birthplace of flowers and the haunt of birds and bees; and hidden hooks are waiting there for the thrill of lovers' whispers. There the moon-light, that is all one kiss for the malati flowers, has its deep message, but those who understand it are far below fifty.

And alas, youth is inexperienced and wilful, therefore it is but meet that the old should take charge of the household, and the young take to the seclusion of forest shades and the severe discipline of courting.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XL: A Message Came

A message came from my youth of vanished days, saying, " I wait for you among the quivering of unborn May, where smiles ripen for tears and hours ache with songs unsung."
It says, "Come to me across the worn-out track of age, through the gates of death. For dreams fade, hopes fail, the fathered fruits of the year decay, but I am the eternal truth, and you shall meet me again and again in your voyage of life from shore to shore."

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XLII: Are You a Mere Picture

Are you a mere picture, and not as true as those stars, true as this dust? They throb with the pulse of things, but you are immensely aloof in your stillness, painted form.

The day was when you walked with me, your breath warm, your limbs singing of life. My world found its speech in your voice, and touched my heart with your face. You suddenly stopped in your walk, in the shadow-side of the Forever, and I went on alone.

Life, like a child, laughs, shaking its rattle of death as it runs; it beckons me on, I follow the unseen; but you stand there, where you stopped behind that dust and those stars; and you are a mere picture.

No, it cannot be. Had the life-flood utterly stopped in you, it would stop the river in its flow, and the foot-fall of dawn in her cadence of colours. Had the glimmering dusk of your hair vanished in the hopeless dark, the woodland shade of summer would die with its dreams.

Can it be true that I forgot you? We haste on without heed, forgetting the flowers on the roadside hedge. Yet they breathe unaware into our forgetfulness, filling it with music. You have moved from my world, to take seat at the root of my life, and therefore is this forgetting-remembrance lost in its own depth.

You are no longer before my songs, but one with them. You came to me with the first ray of dawn. I lost you with the last gold of evening. Ever since I am always finding you through the dark. No, you are no mere picture.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XLIII: Dying, You Have Left Behind

Dying, you have left behind you the great sadness of the Eternal
in my life. You have painted my thought's horizon with the sunset
colours of your departure, leaving a track of tears across the
earth to love's heaven. Clasped in your dear arms, life and death
united in me in a marriage bond.
    I think I can see you watching there in the balcony with your
lamp lighted, where the end and the beginning of all things meet.
My world went hence through the doors that you opened-you holding
the cup of death to my lips, filling it with life from your own.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XLIV: Where Is Heaven

Where is heaven? you ask me, my child,-the sages tell us it is
beyond the limits of birth and death, unswayed by the rhythm of day
and night; it is not of the earth.
    But your poet knows that its eternal hunger is for time and
space, and it strives evermore to be born in the fruitful dust.
Heaven is fulfilled in your sweet body, my child, in your
palpitating heart.
    The sea is beating its drums in joy, the flowers are a-tiptoe
to kiss you. For heaven is born in you, in the arms of the mother-
dust.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XLVII: The Road Is

The road is my wedded companion. She speaks to me under my feet all day, she sings to my dreams all night.
My meeting with her had no beginning, it begins endlessly at each daybreak, renewing its summer in fresh flowers and songs, and her every new kiss is the first kiss to me.
The road and I are lovers. I change my dress for her night after night, leaving the tattered cumber of the old in the wayside inns when the day dawns.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XLVIII: I Travelled the Old Road

I travelled the old road every day, I took my fruits to the market,
my cattle to the meadows, I ferried my boat across the stream and
all the ways were well known to me.
    One morning my basket was heavy with wares. Men were busy in
the fields, the pastures crowded with cattle; the breast of earth
heaved with the mirth of ripening rice.
    Suddenly there was a tremor in the air, and the sky seemed to
kiss me on my forehead. My mind started up like the morning out of
mist.
    I forgot to follow the track. I stepped a few paces from the
path, and my familiar world appeared strange to me, like a flower
I had only known in bud.
    My everyday wisdom was ashamed. I went astray in the fairyland
of things. It was the best luck of my life that I lost my path that
morning, and found my eternal childhood.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XVI: She Dwelt Here by the Pool

She dwelt here by the pool with its landing-stairs in ruins. Many an evening she had watched the moon made dizzy by the shaking of bamboo leaves, and on many a rainy day the smell of the wet earth had come to her over the young shoots of rice.

Her pet name is known here among those date-palm groves and in the courtyards where girls sit and talk while stitching their winter quilts. The water in this pool keeps in its depth the memory of her swimming limbs, and her wet feet had left their marks, day after day, on the footpath leading to the village.

The women who come to-day with their vessels to the water have all seen her smile over simple jests, and the old peasant, taking his bullocks to their bath, used to stop at her door every day to greet her.

Many a sailing-boat passes by this village; many a traveller takes rest beneath that banyan tree; the ferry-boat crosses to yonder ford carrying crowds to the market; but they never notice this spot by the village road, near the pool with its ruined landing-stairs,-where dwelt she whom I love.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XVIII: Your Days

Your days will be full of cares, if you must give me your heart.
My house by the cross-roads has its doors open and my mind is absent, -for I sing.
    I shall never be made to answer for it, if you must give me your heart. If I pledge my word to you in tunes now, and am too much in earnest to keep it when music is silent, you must forgive me; for the law laid down in May is best broken in December.
    Do not always keep remembering it, if you must give me your heart. When your eyes sing with love, and your voice ripples with laughter, my answers to your questions will be wild, and not miserly accurate in facts, -they are to be believed for ever and then forgotten for good.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XXII: I Shall Gladly Suffer

I shall gladly suffer the pride of culture to die out in my house,
if only in some happy future I am born a herd-boy in the Brinda
forest.
    The herd-boy who grazes his cattle sitting under the banyan
tree, and idly weaves gunja flowers into garlands, who loves to
splash and plunge in the Jamuna's cool deep stream.
    He calls his companions to wake up when morning dawns, and all
the houses in the lane hum with the sound of the churn, clouds of
dust are raised by the cattle, the maidens come out in the
courtyard to milk the king.
    As the shadows deepen under the tomal trees, and the dusk
gathers on the river-banks; when the milkmaids, while crossing the
turbulent water, tremble with fear; and loud peacocks, with tails
outspread, dance in the forest, he watchers the summer clouds.
    When the April night is sweet as a fresh-blown flower, he
disappears in the forest with a peacock's plume in his hair; the
swing ropes are twined with flowers on the branches; the south wind
throbs with music, and the merry shepherd boys crowd on the banks
of the blue river.
    No, I will never be the leader, brothers, of this new age of
new Bengal; I shall not trouble to light the lamp of culture for
the benighted. If only I could be born, under the shady asoka
groves, in some village of Brinda, where milk is churned by the
maidens!

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XXVIII: I Dreamt

I dreamt that she sat by my head, tenderly ruffling my hair with her fingers, playing the melody of her touch. I looked at her face and struggled with my tears, till the agony of unspoken words burst my sleep like a bubble.

I sat up and saw the glow of the Milky Way above my window, like a world of silence on fire, and I wondered if at this moment she had a dream that rhymed with mine.

Rabindranath Tagore

Lover's Gifts XXXIX: There Is a Looker-On

There is a looker-on who sits behind my eyes. I seems he has seen things in ages and worlds beyond memory's shore, and those forgotten sights glisten on the grass and shiver on the leaves. He has seen under new veils the face of the one beloved, in twilight hours of many a nameless star. Therefore his sky seems to ache with the pain of countless meetings and partings, and a longing pervades this spring breeze, -the longing that is full of the whisper of ages without beginning.

Rabindranath Tagore

Maya

That I should make much of myself and turn it on all sides,
thus casting colored shadows on thy radiance
---such is thy Maya.

Thou settest a barrier in thine own being
and then callest thy severed self in myriad notes.
This thy self-separation has taken body in me.

The poignant song is echoed through all the sky in many-coloued tears
and smiles, alarms and hopes; waves rise up and sink again,
dreams break and form.
In me is thy own defeat of self.

This screen that thou hast raised is painted with innumerable figures
with the brush of the night and the day.
Behind it thy seat is woven in wondrous mysteries of curves,
casting away all barren lines of straightness.

The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky.
With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant,
and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.

Rabindranath Tagore

Moment's Indulgence

I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side. The works
that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.

Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor respite,
and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil.

Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and
the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove.

Now it is time to sit quite, face to face with thee, and to sing
dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure

Rabindranath Tagore

My Friend

Art thou abroad on this stormy night
on thy journey of love, my friend?
The sky groans like one in despair.

I have no sleep tonight.
Ever and again I open my door and look out on
the darkness, my friend!

I can see nothing before me.
I wonder where lies thy path!

By what dim shore of the ink-black river,
by what far edge of the frowning forest,
through what mazy depth of gloom art thou threading
thy course to come to me, my friend?

Rabindranath Tagore

My Song

This song of mine will wind its music around you, my child, like the fond arms of love.
This song of mine will touch your forehead like a kiss of blessing.
When you are alone it will sit by your side and whisper in your ear, when you are in the crowd it will fence you about with aloofness.
My song will be like a pair of wings to your dreams, it will transport your heart to the verge of the unknown.
It will be like the faithful star overhead when dark night is over your road.
My song will sit in the pupils of your eyes, and will carry your sight into the heart of things.
And when my voice is silent in death, my song will speak in your living heart.

Rabindranath Tagore

O Fool

O Fool, try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders!
O beggar, to come beg at thy own door!

Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all,
and never look behind in regret.

Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath.
It is unholy---take not thy gifts through its unclean hands.
Accept only what is offered by sacred love.

Rabindranath Tagore

Ocean of Forms

I dive down into the depth of the ocean of forms,
hoping to gain the perfect pearl of the formless.

No more sailing from harbor to harbor with this my weather-beaten boat.
The days are long passed when my sport was to be tossed on waves.

And now I am eager to die into the deathless.

Into the audience hall by the fathomless abyss
where swells up the music of toneless strings
I shall take this harp of my life.

I shall tune it to the notes of forever,
and when it has sobbed out its last utterance,
lay down my silent harp at the feet of the silent.

Rabindranath Tagore

Old And New

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not.
Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own.
Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.

I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter;
I forget that there abides the old in the new,
and that there also thou abidest.

Through birth and death, in this world or in others,
wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the same,
the one companion of my endless life
who ever linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar.

When one knows thee, then alien there is none, then no door is shut.
Oh, grant me my prayer that I may never lose
the bliss of the touch of the one
in the play of many.

Rabindranath Tagore

On the Seashore

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.
The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances.
They build their houses with sand, and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of worlds.
They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl-fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.
The sea surges up with laughter, and pale gleams the smile of the sea-beach. Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle. The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea-beach.
On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships are wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play. On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children.

Rabindranath Tagore

Only Thee

That I want thee, only thee---let my heart repeat without end.
All desires that distract me, day and night,
are false and empty to the core.

As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light,
even thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry
---`I want thee, only thee'.

As the storm still seeks its end in peace
when it strikes against peace with all its might,
even thus my rebellion strikes against thy love
and still its cry is
---`I want thee, only thee'.

Rabindranath Tagore

Paper Boats

Day by day I float my paper boats one by one down the running stream.
In bid black letters I write my name on them and the name of the village where I live.
I hope that someone in some strange land will find them and know who I am.
I load my little boats with shiuli flower from our garden, and hope that these blooms of the dawn will be carried safely to land in the night.
I launch my paper boats and look up into the sky and see the little clouds setting thee white bulging sails.
I know not what playmate of mine in the sky sends them down the air to race with my boats!
When night comes I bury my face in my arms and dream that my paper boats float on and on under the midnight stars.
The fairies of sleep are sailing in them, and the lading ins their baskets full of dreams.

Rabindranath Tagore

Parting Words

When I go from hence
let this be my parting word,
that what I have seen is unsurpassable.

I have tasted of the hidden honey of this lotus
that expands on the ocean of light,
and thus am I blessed
---let this be my parting word.

In this playhouse of infinite forms
I have had my play
and here have I caught sight of him that is formless.

My whole body and my limbs
have thrilled with his touch who is beyond touch;
and if the end comes here, let it come
---let this be my parting word.

Rabindranath Tagore

Passing Breeze

Yes, I know, this is nothing but thy love,
O beloved of my heart---this golden light that dances upon the leaves,
these idle clouds sailing across the sky,
this passing breeze leaving its coolness upon my forehead.

The morning light has flooded my eyes---this is thy message to my heart.
Thy face is bent from above, thy eyes look down on my eyes,
and my heart has touched thy feet.

Rabindranath Tagore

Patience

If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it.
I will keep still and wait like the night with starry vigil
and its head bent low with patience.

The morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish,
and thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking through the sky.

Then thy words will take wing in songs from every one of my birds' nests,
and thy melodies will break forth in flowers in all my forest groves.

Rabindranath Tagore

Playthings

Child, how happy you are sitting in the dust, playing with a broken twig all the morning.
I smile at your play with that little bit of a broken twig.
I am busy with my accounts, adding up figures by the hour.
Perhaps you glance at me and think, "What a stupid game to spoil your morning with!"
Child, I have forgotten the art of being absorbed in sticks and mud-pies.
I seek out costly playthings, and gather lumps of gold and silver.
With whatever you find you create your glad games, I spend both my time and my strength over things I never can obtain.
In my frail canoe I struggle to cross the sea of desire, and forget that I too am playing a game.

Rabindranath Tagore

Prisoner

`Prisoner, tell me, who was it that bound you?'

`It was my master,' said the prisoner.
`I thought I could outdo everybody in the world in wealth and power,
and I amassed in my own treasure-house the money due to my king.
When sleep overcame me I lay upon the bed that was for my lord,
and on waking up I found I was a prisoner in my own treasure-house.'

`Prisoner, tell me, who was it that wrought this unbreakable chain?'

`It was I,' said the prisoner, `who forged this chain very carefully.
I thought my invincible power would hold the world captive
leaving me in a freedom undisturbed.
Thus night and day I worked at the chain
with huge fires and cruel hard strokes.
When at last the work was done
and the links were complete and unbreakable,
I found that it held me in its grip.'

Rabindranath Tagore

Purity

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing
that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing
that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my
love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.

And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it
is thy power gives me strength to act.

Rabindranath Tagore

Roaming Cloud

I am like a remnant of a cloud of autumn
uselessly roaming in the sky, O my sun ever-glorious!
Thy touch has not yet melted my vapor,
making me one with thy light,
and thus I count months and years separated from thee.

If this be thy wish and if this be thy play,
then take this fleeting emptiness of mine,
paint it with colors, gild it with gold,
float it on the wanton wind and spread it in varied wonders.

And again when it shall be thy wish to end this play at night,
I shall melt and vanish away in the dark,
or it may be in a smile of the white morning,
in a coolness of purity transparent.

Rabindranath Tagore

Sail Away

Early in the day it was whispered that we should sail in a boat,
only thou and I, and never a soul in the world would know of this our
pilgrimage to no country and to no end.

In that shoreless ocean,
at thy silently listening smile my songs would swell in melodies,
free as waves, free from all bondage of words.

Is the time not come yet?
Are there works still to do?
Lo, the evening has come down upon the shore
and in the fading light the seabirds come flying to their nests.

Who knows when the chains will be off,
and the boat, like the last glimmer of sunset,
vanish into the night?

Rabindranath Tagore

Salutation

In one salutation to thee, my God,
let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet.

Like a rain-cloud of July
hung low with its burden of unshed showers
let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current
and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day
back to their mountain nests
let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home
in one salutation to thee.

Rabindranath Tagore

Seashore

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.
The infinite sky is motionless overhead
and the restless water is boisterous.
On the seashore of endless worlds
the children meet with shouts and dances.

They build their houses with sand
and they play with empty shells.
With withered leaves they weave their boats
and smilingly float them on the vast deep.
Children have their play on the seashore of worlds.

They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets.
Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships,
while children gather pebbles and scatter them again.
They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.

The sea surges up with laughter
and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach.
Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children,
even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle.
The sea plays with children,
and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach.

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.
Tempest roams in the pathless sky,
ships get wrecked in the trackless water,
death is abroad and children play.
On the seashore of endless worlds is the
great meeting of children.

Rabindranath Tagore

Senses

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation.
I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.

Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various
colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim.

My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame
and place them before the altar of thy temple.

No, I will never shut the doors of my senses.
The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.

Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy,
and all my desires ripen into fruits of love.

Rabindranath Tagore

She

She who ever had remained in the depth of my being,
in the twilight of gleams and of glimpses;
she who never opened her veils in the morning light,
will be my last gift to thee, my God, folded in my final song.

Words have wooed yet failed to win her;
persuasion has stretched to her its eager arms in vain.

I have roamed from country to country keeping her in the core of my heart,
and around her have risen and fallen the growth and decay of my life.

Over my thoughts and actions, my slumbers and dreams,
she reigned yet dwelled alone and apart.

Many a man knocked at my door and asked for her
and turned away in despair.

There was none in the world who ever saw her face to face,
and she remained in her loneliness waiting for thy recognition.

Rabindranath Tagore

Signet of Eternity

The day was when I did not keep myself in readiness for thee;
and entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd,
unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon
many a fleeting moment of my life.

And today when by chance I light upon them and see thy signature,
I find they have lain scattered in the dust mixed with the memory of
joys and sorrows of my trivial days forgotten.

Thou didst not turn in contempt from my childish play among dust,
and the steps that I heard in my playroom
are the same that are echoing from star to star.

Rabindranath Tagore

Silent Steps

Have you not heard his silent steps?
He comes, comes, ever comes.

Every moment and every age,
every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes.

Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind,
but all their notes have always proclaimed,
`He comes, comes, ever comes.'

In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path he comes,
comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds
he comes, comes, ever comes.

In sorrow after sorrow it is his steps that press upon my heart,
and it is the golden touch of his feet that makes my joy to shine.

Rabindranath Tagore

Sit Smiling

I boasted among men that I had known you.
They see your pictures in all works of mine.
They come and ask me, `Who is he?'
I know not how to answer them. I say, `Indeed, I cannot tell.'
They blame me and they go away in scorn.
And you sit there smiling.

I put my tales of you into lasting songs.
The secret gushes out from my heart.
They come and ask me, `Tell me all your meanings.'
I know not how to answer them.
I say, `Ah, who knows what they mean!'
They smile and go away in utter scorn.
And you sit there smiling.

Rabindranath Tagore

Sleep

In the night of weariness
let me give myself up to sleep without struggle,
resting my trust upon thee.

Let me not force my flagging spirit into a poor preparation for thy worship.

It is thou who drawest the veil of night upon the tired eyes of the day
to renew its sight in a fresher gladness of awakening.

Rabindranath Tagore

Sleep-Stealer

Who stole sleep from baby's eyes? I must know.
    Clasping her pitcher to her waist mother went to fetch water from the village near by.
    It was noon. The children's playtime was over; the ducks in the pond were silent.
    The shepherd boy lay asleep under the shadow of the banyan tree.
    The crane stood grave and still in the swamp near the mango grove.
    In the meanwhile the Sleep-stealer came and, snatching sleep from baby's eyes, flew away.
    When mother came back she found baby travelling the room over on all fours.
    Who stole sleep from our baby's eyes? I must know. I must find her and chain her up.
    I must look into that dark cave, where, through boulders and scowling stones, trickles a tiny stream.
    I must search in the drowsy shade of the bakula grove, where pigeons coo in their corner, and fairies' anklets tinkle in the stillness of starry nights.
    In the evening I will peep into the whispering silence of the bamboo forest, where fireflies squander their light, and will ask every creature I meet, "Can anybody tell me where the Sleep-stealer lives?"
    Who stole sleep from baby's eyes? I must know.
    Shouldn't I give her a good lesson if I could only catch her!
    I would raid her nest and see where she hoards all her stolen sleep.
    I would plunder it all, and carry it home.
    I would bind her two wings securely, set her on the bank of the river, and then let her play at fishing with a reed among the rushes and water-lilies.
    When the marketing is over in the evening, and the village children sit in their mothers' laps, then the night birds will mockingly din her ears with:
    "Whose sleep will you steal now?"

Rabindranath Tagore

Song Unsung

The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day.

I have spent my days in stringing and in unstringing my instrument.

The time has not come true, the words have not been rightly set;
only there is the agony of wishing in my heart.

The blossom has not opened; only the wind is sighing by.

I have not seen his face, nor have I listened to his voice;
only I have heard his gentle footsteps from the road before my house.

The livelong day has passed in spreading his seat on the floor;
but the lamp has not been lit and I cannot ask him into my house.

I live in the hope of meeting with him; but this meeting is not yet.

Rabindranath Tagore

Still Heart

When I give up the helm
I know that the time has come for thee to take it.
What there is to do will be instantly done.
Vain is this struggle.

Then take away your hands
and silently put up with your defeat, my heart,
and think it your good fortune to sit perfectly still
where you are placed.

These my lamps are blown out at every little puff of wind,
and trying to light them I forget all else again and again.

But I shall be wise this time and wait in the dark,
spreading my mat on the floor;
and whenever it is thy pleasure, my lord,
come silently and take thy seat here.

Rabindranath Tagore

Stream Of Life

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day
runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth
in numberless blades of grass
and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth
and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life.
And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.

Rabindranath Tagore

Strong Mercy

My desires are many and my cry is pitiful,
but ever didst thou save me by hard refusals;
and this strong mercy has been wrought into my life through and through.

Day by day thou art making me worthy of the simple,
great gifts that thou gavest to me unasked---this sky and the light, this body and the life and the mind---saving me from perils of overmuch desire.

There are times when I languidly linger
and times when I awaken and hurry in search of my goal;
but cruelly thou hidest thyself from before me.

Day by day thou art making me worthy of thy full acceptance by
refusing me ever and anon, saving me from perils of weak, uncertain desire.

Rabindranath Tagore

Superior

Mother, your baby is silly! She is so absurdly childish!
She does not know the difference between the lights in the streets and the stars.
When we play at eating with pebbles, she thinks they are real food, and tries to put them into her mouth.
When I open a book before her and ask her to learn her a, b, c, she tears the leaves with her hands and roars for joy at nothing; this is your baby's way of doing her lesson.
When I shake my head at her in anger and scold her and call her naughty, she laughs and thinks it great fun.
Everybody knows that father is away, but if in play I call aloud "Father," she looks about her in excitement and thinks that father is near.
When I hold my class with the donkeys that our washer man brings to carry away the clothes and I warn her that I am the schoolmaster, she will scream for no reason and call me dada.
Your baby wants to catch the moon. She is so funny; she calls Ganesh Ganush.
Mother, your baby is silly! She is so absurdly childish!

Rabindranath Tagore

Sympathy

If I were only a little puppy, not your baby, mother dear, would
you say "No" to me if I tried to eat from your dish?
Would you drive me off, saying to me, "Get away, you naughty
little puppy?"
Then go, mother, go! I will never come to you when you call
me, and never let you feed me any more.
If I were only a little green parrot, and not your baby,
mother dear, would you keep me chained lest I should fly away?
Would you shake your finger at me and say, "What an ungrateful
wretch of a bird! It is gnawing at its chain day and night?"
The go, mother, go! I will run away into the woods; I will
never let you take me in your arms again.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Astronomer

I only said, "When in the evening the round full moon gets
entangled among the beaches of that Dadam tree, couldn't somebody
catch it?"
    But dada laughed at me and said, "Baby, you are the silliest
child I have ever known. The moon is ever so far from us, how could
anybody catch it?"
    I said, "Dada, how foolish you are! When mother looks out of
her window and smiles down at us playing, would you call her far
away?"
    Still dada said, "You are a stupid child! But, baby where
could you find a net big enough to catch the moon with?"
    I said, "Surely you could catch it with your hands."
    But dada laughed and said, "You are the silliest child I have
known. If it came nearer, you would see how big the moon is."
    I said, "Dada, what nonsense they teach at your school! When
mother bends her face down to kiss us, does her face look very
big?"
    But still dada says, "You are a stupid child."

Rabindranath Tagore

The Banyan Tree

O you shaggy-headed banyan tree standing on the bank of the pond,
have you forgotten the little chile, like the birds that have
nested in your branches and left you?
Do you not remember how he sat at the window and wondered at
the tangle of your roots and plunged underground?
The women would come to fill their jars in the pond, and your
huge black shadow would wriggle on the water like sleep struggling
to wake up.
Sunlight danced on the ripples like restless tiny shuttles
weaving golden tapestry.
Two ducks swam by the weedy margin above their shadows, and
the child would sit still and think.
He longed to be the wind and blow through your resting
branches, to be your shadow and lengthen with the day on the water,
to be a bird and perch on your topmost twig, and to float like
those ducks among the weeds and shadows.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Beginning

"Where have I come from, where did you pick me up?" the baby asked its mother.
She answered, half crying, half laughing, and clasping the baby to her breast-
"You were hidden in my heart as its desire, my darling.
You were in the dolls of my childhood's games; and when with clay I made the image of my god every morning, I made the unmade you then.
You were enshrined with our household deity, in his worship I worshipped you.
In all my hopes and my loves, in my life, in the life of my mother you have lived.
In the lap of the deathless Spirit who rules our home you have been nursed for ages.
When in girlhood my heart was opening its petals, you hovered as a fragrance about it.
Your tender softness bloomed in my youthful limbs, like a glow in the sky before the sunrise.
Heaven's first darling, twain-born with the morning light, you have floated down the stream of the world's life, and at last you have stranded on my heart.
As I gaze on your face, mystery overwhelms me; you who belong to all have become mine.
For fear of losing you I hold you tight to my breast. What magic has snared the world's treasure in these slender arms of mine?"

Rabindranath Tagore

The Boat

I must launch out my boat.
The languid hours pass by on the
shore---Alas for me!

The spring has done its flowering and taken leave.
And now with the burden of faded futile flowers I wait and linger.

The waves have become clamorous, and upon the bank in the shady lane
the yellow leaves flutter and fall.

What emptiness do you gaze upon!
Do you not feel a thrill passing through the air
with the notes of the far-away song
floating from the other shore?

Rabindranath Tagore

The Chanpa Flower

Supposing I became a chanpa flower, just for fun, and grew on a
branch high up that tree, and shook in the wind with laughter and
danced upon the newly budded leaves, would you know me, mother?
You would call, "Baby, where are you?" and I should laugh to
myself and keep quite quiet.
I should slyly open my petals and watch you at your work.
When after your bath, with wet hair spread on your shoulders,
you walked through the shadow of the champ tree to the little court
where you say your prayers, you would notice the scent of the
flower, but not know that it cane from me.
When after the midday meal you sat at the window reading
ramayana, and the tree's shadow fell over your hair and your lap,
I should fling my wee little shadow on to the page of your book,
just where you were reading.
But would you guess that it was the tiny shadow of your
little child?
When in the evening you went to the cow shed with the lighted
lamp in your hand I should suddenly drop on to the earth again and
be your own baby once more, and beg you to tell me a story.
"Where have you been, you naughty child?"
"I won't tell you, mother." That's what you and I would say
then.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Child-Angel

They clamour and fight, they doubt and despair, they know no end to their wrangling.

Let your life come amongst them like a flame of light, my child, unflickering and pure, and delight them into silence.

They are cruel in their greed and their envy, their words are like hidden knives thirsting for blood.

Go and stand amidst their scowling hearts, my child, and let your gentle eyes fall upon them like the forgiving peace of the evening over the strife of the day.

Let them see your face, my child, and thus know the meaning of all things; let them love you and thus love each other.

Come and take your seat in the bosom of the limitless, my child. At sunrise open and raise your heart like a blossoming flower, and at sunset bend your head and in silence complete the worship of the day.

Rabindranath Tagore

The End

It is time for me to go, mother; I am going.
When in the paling darkness of the lonely dawn you stretch out your arms for your baby in the bed, I shall say, "Baby is not here!"-mother, I am going.
I shall become a delicate draught of air and caress you and I shall be ripples in the water when you bathe, and kiss you and kiss you again.
In the gusty night when the rain patters on the leaves you will hear my whisper in your bed, and my laughter will flash with the lightning through the open window into your room.
If you lie awake, thinking of your baby till late into the night, I shall sing to you from the stars, "Sleep, mother, sleep."
One the straying moonbeams I shall steal over your bed, and lie upon your bosom while you sleep.
I shall become a dream, and through the little opening of your eyelids I shall slip into the depths of your sleep; and when you wake up and look round startled, like a twinkling firefly I shall flit out into the darkness.
When, on the great festival of puja, the neighbours' children come and play about the house, I shall melt into the music of the flute and throb in your heart all day.
Dear auntie will come with puja-presents and will ask,"Where is our baby, sister?" Mother, you will tell her softly, "He is in the pupils of my eyes, he is in my body and in my soul."

Rabindranath Tagore

The First Jasmines

Ah, these jasmines, these white jasmines!
I seem to remember the first day when I filled my hands with these jasmines, these white jasmines.
I have loved the sunlight, the sky and the green earth;
I have heard the liquid murmur of the river thorough the darkness of midnight;
Autumn sunsets have come to me at the bend of a road in the lonely waste, like a bride raising her veil to accept her lover.
Yet my memory is still sweet with the first white jasmines that I held in my hands when I was a child.
Many a glad day has come in my life, and I have laughed with merrymakers on festival nights.
On grey mornings of rain I have crooned many an idle song.
I have worn round my neck the evening wreath of bakulas woven by the hand of love.
Yet my heart is sweet with the memory of the first fresh jasmines that filled my hands when I was a child.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Flower-School

When storm-clouds rumble in the sky and June showers come down.
The moist east wind comes marching over the heath to blow its bagpipes among the bamboos.
Then crowds of flowers come out of a sudden, from nobody knows where, and dance upon the grass in wild glee.
Mother, I really think the flowers go to school underground.
They do their lessons with doors shut, and if they want to come out to play before it is time, their master makes them stand in a corner.
When the rain come they have their holidays.
Branches clash together in the forest, and the leaves rustle in the wild wind, the thunder-clouds clap their giant hands and the flower children rush out in dresses of pink and yellow and white.
Do you know, mother, their home is in the sky, where the stars are.
Haven't you see how eager they are to get there? Don't you know why they are in such a hurry?
Of course, I can guess to whom they raise their arms; they have their mother as I have my own.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Further Bank

I long to go over there to the further bank of the river.
Where those boats are tied to the bamboo poles in a line;
Where men cross over in their boats in the morning with ploughs on their shoulders to till their far-away fields;
Where the cowherds make their lowing cattle swim across to the riverside pasture;
Whence they all come back home in the evening, leaving the jackals to howl in the island overgrown with weeds.
Mother, if you don't mind, I should like to become the boatman of the ferry when I am grown up.
They say there are strange pools hidden behind that high bank.
Where flocks of wild ducks come when the rains are over, and thick reeds grow round the margins where water-birds lay their eggs;
Where snipes with their dancing tails stamp their tiny footprints upon the clean soft mud;
Where in the evening the tall grasses crested with while flowers invite the moonbeam to float upon their waves.
Mother, if you don't mind, I should like to become the boatman of the ferryboat when I am grown up.
I shall cross and cross back from bank to bank, and all the boys and girls of the village will wonder at me while they are bathing.
When the sun climbs the mid sky and morning wears on to noon, I shall come running to you, saying, "Mother, I am hungry."
When the day is done and the shadows cower under the trees, I shall come back in the dust.
I shall never go away from you into the town to work like father.
Mother, if you don't mind, I should like to become the boatman of the ferryboat when I am grown up.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener IV: Ah Me

Ah me, why did they build my house by the road to the market town?
They moor their laden boats near my trees.
They come and go and wander at their will.
I sit and watch them; my time wears on.
Turn them away I cannot. And thus my days pass by.
Night and day their steps sound by my door.
Vainly I cry, "I do not know you."
Some of them are known to my fingers, some to my nostrils, the blood in my veins seems to know them, and some are known to my dreams.
Turn them away I cannot. I call them and say, "Come to my house whoever chooses. Yes, come."
In the morning the bell rings in the temple.
They come with their baskets in their hands.
Their feet are rosy red. The early light of dawn is on their faces.
Turn them away I cannot. I call them and I say, "Come to my garden to gather flowers. Come hither."
In the mid-day the gong sounds at the palace gate.
I know not why they leave their work and linger near my hedge.
The flowers in their hair are pale and faded; the notes are languid in their flutes.
Turn them away I cannot. I call them and say, "The shade is cool under my trees. Come, friends."
At night the crickets chirp in the woods.
Who is it that comes slowly to my door and gently knocks?
I vaguely see the face, not a word is spoken, the stillness of the sky is all around.
Turn away my silent guest I cannot. I look at the face through the dark, and hours of dreams pass by.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener IX: When I Go Alone at Night

When I go alone at night to my
love-tryst, birds do not sing, the wind
does not stir, the houses on both sides
of the street stand silent.
It is my own anklets that grow loud
at every step and I am ashamed.
When I sit on my balcony and listen
for his footsteps, leaves do not rustle
on the trees, and the water is still in
the river like the sword on the knees
of a sentry fallen asleep.
It is my own heart that beats wildly
--I do not know how to quiet it.
When my love comes and sits by
my side, when my body trembles and
my eyelids droop, the night darkens,
the wind blows out the lamp, and the
clouds draw veils over the stars.
It is the jewel at my own breast
that shines and gives light. I do not
know how to hide it.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LI: Then Finish the Last Song

Then finish the last song and let us
leave.
    Forget this night when the night is
no more.
    Whom do I try to clasp in my
arms? Dreams can never be made captive.
    My eager hands press emptiness to
my heart and it bruises my breast.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LIX: O Woman

O woman, you are not merely the
handiwork of God, but also of men;
these are ever endowing you with
beauty from their hearts.
Poets are weaving for you a web
with threads of golden imagery;
painters are giving your form ever
new immortality.
The sea gives its pearls, the mines
their gold, the summer gardens their
flowers to deck you, to cover you, to
make you more precious.
The desire of men's hearts has shed
its glory over your youth.
You are one half woman and one
half dream.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LV: It Was Mid-Day

It was mid-day when you went
away .
The sun was strong in the sky.
I had done my work and sat alone
on my balcony when you went away.
Fitful gusts came winnowing
through the smells of may distant
fields.
The doves cooed tireless in the shade,
and a bee strayed in my room hum-
ming the news of many distant fields.
The village slept in the noonday
heat. The road lay deserted.
In sudden fits the rustling of the
leaves rose and died.
I gazed at the sky and wove in the
blue the letters of a name I had known,
while the village slept in the noonday
heat.
I had forgotten to braid my hair.
The languid breeze played with it upon
my cheek.
The river ran unruffled under the
shady bank.
The lazy white clouds did not move.
I had forgotten to braid my hair.
It was mid-day when you went
away.
The dust of the road was hot and
the fields panting.
The doves cooed among the dense
leaves.
I was alone in my balcony when you
went away.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LVII: I Plucked Your Flower

I plucked your flower, O world!
I pressed it to my heart and the
thorn pricked.
When the day waned and it
darkened, I found that the flower had
faded, but the pain remained.
More flowers will come to you with
perfume and pride, O world!
But my time for flower-gathering
is over, and through the dark night
I have not my rose, only the pain
remains.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LXI: Peace, My Heart

Peace, my heart, let the time for
the parting be sweet.
Let it not be a death but completeness.
Let love melt into memory and pain
into songs.
Let the flight through the sky end
in the folding of the wings over the
nest.
Let the last touch of your hands be
gentle like the flower of the night.
Stand still, O Beautiful End, for a
moment, and say your last words in
silence.
I bow to you and hold up my lamp
to light you on your way.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LXIV: I Spent My Day

I spent my day on the scorching
hot dust of the road.
Now, in the cool of the evening, I
knock at the door of the inn. It is
deserted and in ruins.
A grim ashath tree spreads its
hungry clutching roots through the
gaping fissures of the walls.
Days have been when wayfarers
came here to wash their weary feet.
They spread their mats in the
courtyard in the dim light of the
early moon, and sat and talked of
strange lands.
They woke refreshed in the morning
when birds made them glad, and
friendly flowers nodded their heads
at them from the wayside.
But no lighted lamp awaited me
when I came here.
The black smudges of smoke left by
many a forgotten evening lamp stare,
like blind eyes, from the wall.
Fireflies flit in the bush near the
dried-up pond, and bamboo branches
fling their shadows on the grass-
grown path.
I am the guest of no one at the end
of my day.
The long night is before me, and I
am tired.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LXIX: I Hunt for the Golden Stag

I hunt for the golden stag.
    You may smile, my friends, but I
pursue the vision that eludes me.
    I run across hills and dales, I wander
through nameless lands, because I am
hunting for the golden stag.
    You come and buy in the market
and go back to your homes laden with
goods, but the spell of the homeless
winds has touched me I know not when
and where.
    I have no care in my heart; all my
belongings I have left far behind me.
    I run across hills and dales, I wander
through nameless lands--because I am
hunting for the golden stag.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LXVIII: None Lives For Ever, Brother

None lives for ever, brother, and
nothing lasts for long. Keep that in
mind and rejoice.
Our life is not the one old burden,
our path is not the one long
journey.
One sole poet has not to sing one
aged song.
The flower fades and dies; but he
who wears the flower has not to
mourn for it for ever.
Brother, keep that in mind and
rejoice.
There must come a full pause to
weave perfection into music.
Life droops toward its sunset to be
drowned in the golden shadows.
Love must be called from its play
to drink sorrow and be borne to the
heaven of tears.
Brother, keep that in min and
rejoice.
We hasten to gather our flowers lest
they are plundered by the passing
winds.
It quickens our blood and brightens
our eyes to snatch kisses that would
vanish if we delayed.
Our life is eager, our desires are keen,
for time tolls the bell of parting.
Brother, keep that in mind and
rejoice.
There is not time for us to clasp a
thing and crush it and fling it away to
the dust.
The hours trip rapidly away, hiding
their dreams in their skirts.
Our life is short; it yields but a
few days for love.
Were it for work and drudgery it
would be endlessly long.
Brother, keep that in mind and
rejoice.
Beauty is sweet to us, because she
dances to the same fleeting tune with
our lives.
Knowledge is precious to us, because
we shall never have time to
complete it.
All is done and finished in the eternal
Heaven.
But earth's flowers of illusion are

kept eternally fresh by death.
Brother, keep that in mind and
rejoice.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LXXIX: I Often Wonder

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitiation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LXXV: At Midnight

At midnight the would-be ascetic announced:
"This is the time to give up my home and seek for God. Ah, who has held me so long in delusion here?"
God whispered, "I," but the ears of the man were stopped.
With a baby asleep at her breast lay his wife, peacefully sleeping on one side of the bed.
The man said, "Who are ye that have fooled me so long?"
The voice said again, "They are God," but he heard it not.
The baby cried out in its dream, nestling close to its mother.
God commanded, "Stop, fool, leave not thy home," but still he heard not.
God sighed and complained, "Why does my servant wander to seek me, forsaking me?"

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LXXVI: The Fair Was On

The fair was on before the temple.
It had rained from the early morning
and the day came to its end.
    Brighter than all the gladness of
the crowd was the bright smile of
a girl who bought for a farthing a
whistle of palm leaf.
    The shrill joy of that whistle floated
above all laughter and noise.
    An endless throng of people came
and jostled together. The road was
muddy, the river in flood, the field
under water in ceaseless rain.
    Greater than all the troubles of
the crowd was a little boy's trouble--
he had not a farthing to buy a painted
stick.
    His wistful eyes gazing at the shop
made this whole meeting of men so
pitiful.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LXXXI: Why Do You Whisper So Faintly

Why do you whisper so faintly in
my ears, O Death, my Death?
When the flowers droop in the
evening and cattle come back to their
stalls, you stealthily come to my side
and speak words that I do not
understand.
Is this how you must woo and win
me with the opiate of drowsy murmur
and cold kisses, O Death, my Death?
Will there be no proud ceremony
for our wedding?
Will you not tie up with a wreath
your tawny coiled locks?
Is there none to carry your banner
before you, and will not the night be
on fire with your red torch-lights,
O Death, my Death?
Come with your conch-shells sound-
ing, come in the sleepless night.
Dress me with a crimson mantle,
grasp my hand and take me.
Let your chariot be ready at my
door with your horses neighing impatiently.
Raise my veil and look at my face
proudly, O Death, my Death!

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LXXXIII: She Dwelt on the Hillside

She dwelt on the hillside by edge of a maize-field, near the spring that flows in laughing rills through the solemn shadows of ancient trees. The women came there to fill their jars, and travellers would sit there to rest and talk. She worked and dreamed daily to the tune of the bubbling stream.

One evening the stranger came down from the cloud-hidden peak; his locks were tangled like drowsy snakes. We asked in wonder, "Who are you?" He answered not but sat by the garrulous stream and silently gazed at the hut where she dwelt. Our hearts quaked in fear and we came back home when it was night.

Next morning when the women came to fetch water at the spring by the deodar trees, they found the doors open in her hut, but her voice was gone and where was her smiling face? The empty jar lay on the floor and her lamp had burnt itself out in the corner. No one knew where she had fled to before it was morning--and the stranger had gone.

In the month of May the sun grew strong and the snow melted, and we sat by the spring and wept. We wondered in our mind, "Is there a spring in the land where she has gone and where she can fill her vessel in these hot thirsty days?" And we asked each other in dismay, "Is there a land beyond these hills where we live?"

It was a summer night; the breeze blew from the south; and I sat in her deserted room where the lamp stood still unlit. When suddenly from before my eyes the hills vanished like curtains drawn aside. "Ah, it is she who comes. How are you, my child? Are you happy? But where can you shelter under this open sky? And, alas! our spring is not here to allay your thirst."

"Here is the same sky," she said, "only free from the fencing hills,-- this is the same stream grown into a

river,--the same earth widened into a plain." "Everything is here," I sighed, "only we are not." She smiled sadly and said, "You are in my heart." I woke up and heard the babbling of the stream and the rustling of the deodars at night.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener LXXXIV: Over the Green

Over the green and yellow rice-fields
sweep the shadows of the autumn
clouds followed by the swift-chasing
sun.
    The bees forget to sip their honey;
drunken with light they foolishly hover
and hum.
    The ducks in the islands of the river
clamour in joy for mere nothing.
    Let none go back home, brothers,
this morning, let none go to work.
    Let us take the blue sky by storm
and plunder space as we run.
    Laughter floats in the air like foam
on the flood.
    Brothers, let us squander our
morning in futile songs.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener X: Let Your Work Be, Bride

Let your work be, bride. Listen, the
guest has come.
    Do you hear, he is gently shaking
the chain which fastens the door?
    See that your anklets make no loud
noise, and that your step is not over-
hurried at meeting him.
    Let your work be, bride, the guest
had come in the evening.
    No, it is not the ghostly wind, bride,
do not be frightened.
    It is the full moon on a night of
April; shadows are pale in the court-
yard; the sky overhead is bright.
    Draw your veil over your face if
you must, carry the lamp to the door
if you fear.
    No, it is not the ghostly wind, bride,
do not be frightened.
    Have no word with him if you are
shy; stand aside by the door when you
meet him.
    If he asks you questions, and if
you wish to, you can lower you eyes
in silence.
    Do not let your bracelets jingle
when, lamp in hand, you lead him in.
    Have no words with him if your are
shy.
    Have you not finished you work yet,
bride? Listen, the guest has come.
    Have you not lit the lamp in the
cowshed?
    Have you not got ready the offering
basket for the evening service?
    Have you not put the red lucky
mark at the parting of your hair, and
done your toilet for the night?
    O bride, do you hear, the guest has
come?
    Let your work be!

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XI: Come As You Are

Come as you are; do not loiter over
your toilet.
If your braided hair has loosened if
the parting of your hair be not straight,
if the ribbons of your bodice be not
fastened, do not mind.
Come as you are; do not loiter over
your toilet.
Come, with quick steps over the
grass.
If the raddle come from your feet
because of the dew, of the rings of bells
upon your feet slacken, if pearls drop
out of your chain, do not mind.
Come, with quick steps over the
grass.
Do you see the clouds wrapping the
sky?
Flocks of cranes fly up from the
further river-bank and fitful gusts of
wind rush over the heath.
The anxious cattle run to their stalls
in the village.
Do you see the clouds wrapping the
sky?
In vain you light your toilet lamp
--it flickers and goes out in the
wind.
Who can know that your eyelids
have not been touched with lamp-
black? For your eyes are darker
than rain-clouds.
In vain you light your toilet lamp--
it goes out.
Come as you are; do not loiter over
your toilet.
If the wreath is not woven, who
cares; if the wrist-chain had not been
linked, let it be.
The sky is overcast with clouds--it
is late.
Come as you are; do not loiter over
your toilet.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XIII: I Asked Nothing

I asked nothing, only stood at the
edge of the wood behind the tree.
    Languor was still upon the eyes
of the dawn, and the dew in the air.
    The lazy smell of the damp grass
hung in the thin mist above the earth.
    Under the banyan tree you were
milking the cow with your hands,
tender and fresh as butter.
    And I was standing still.
    I did not say a word. It was the
bird that sang unseen from the thicket.
    The mango tree was shedding its
flowers upon the village road, and the
bees came humming one by one.
    On the side of the pond the gate of
Shiva's temple was opened and the
worshipper had begun his chants.
    With the vessel on your lap you
were milking the cow.
    I stood with my empty can.
    I did not come near you.
    The sky woke with the sound of
the gong at the temple.
    The dust was raised in the road
from the hoofs of the driven cattle.
    With the gurgling pitchers at their
hips, women came from the river.
    Your bracelets were jingling, and
foam brimming over the jar.
    The morning wore on and I did not
come near you.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XIV: I Was Walking by the Road

I was walking by the road, I do not
know why, when the noonday was past
and bamboo branches rustled in the
wind.
The prone shadows with their out-
stretched arms clung to the feet of
the hurrying light.
The koels were weary of their
songs.
I was walking by the road, I do not
know why.
The hut by the side of the water is
shaded by an overhanging tree.
Some on was busy with her work,
and her bangles made music in the
corner.
I stood before this hut, I know not
why.
The narrow winding road crosses
many a mustard field, and many a
mango forest.
It passes by the temple of the
village and the market at the river
landing-place.
I stopped by this hut, I do not know
why.
Years ago it was a day of breezy
March when the murmur of the spring
was languorous, and mango blossoms
were dropping on the dust.
The rippling water leapt and licked
the brass vessel that stood on the
landing-step.
I think of that day of breezy March,
I do not know why.
Shadows are deepening and cattle
returning to their folds.
The light is grey upon the lonely
meadows, and the villagers are waiting
for the ferry at the bank.
I slowly return upon my steps, I
do not know why.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XIX: You Walked

You walked by the riverside path
with the full pitcher upon your hip.
    Why did you swiftly turn your face
and peep at me through your fluttering
veil?
    That gleaming look from the dark
came upon me like a breeze that sends
a shiver through the rippling water
and sweeps away to the shadowy
shore.
    It came to me like the bird of the
evening that hurriedly flies across the
lampless room from the one open
window to the other, and disappears
in the night.
    You are hidden as a star behind the
hills, and I am a passer-by upon the
road.
    But why did you stop for a moment
and glance at my face through your
veil while you walked by the river-
side path with the full pitcher upon
your hip?

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XL: An Unbelieving Smile

An unbelieving smile flits on your eyes when I come to you to take my leave.
I have done it so often that you think I will soon return.
To tell you the truth I have the same doubt in my mind.
For the spring days come again time after time; the full moon takes leave and comes on another visit, the flowers come again and blush upon their branches year after year, and it is likely that I take my leave only to come to you again.
But keep the illusion awhile; do not send it away with ungentle haste.
When I say I leave you for all time, accept it as true, and let a mist of tears for one moment deepen the dark rim of your eyes.
Then smile as archly as you like when I come again.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XLII: O Mad, Superbly Drunk

O mad, superbly drunk;
If you kick open your doors and
play the fool in public;
If you empty your bag in a night,
and snap your fingers at prudence;
If you walk in curious paths and
play with useless things;
Reck not rhyme or reason;
If unfurling your sails before the
storm you snap the rudder in two,
Then I will follow you, comrade,
and be drunken and go to the dogs.
I have wasted my days and nights
in the company of steady wise neighbours.
Much knowing has turned my hair
grey, and much watching has made
my sight dim.
For years I have gathered and
heaped up scraps and fragments of
things:
Crush them and dance upon them,
and scatter them all to the winds.
For I know 'tis the height of wisdom
to be drunken and go the dogs.
Let all crooked scruples vanish,
let me hopelessly lose my way.
Let a gust of wild giddiness come
and sweep me away from my anchors.
The world is peopled with worthies,
and workers, useful and clever.
There are men who are easily first,
and men who come decently after.
Let them be happy and prosper,
and let me be foolishly futile.
For I know 'tis the end of all works
to be drunken and go to the dogs.
I swear to surrender this moment
all claims to the ranks of the decent.
I let go my pride of learning and
judgment of right and of wrong.
I'll shatter memory's vessel, scattering
the last drop of tears.
With the foam of the berry-red
wine I will bathe and brighten my
laughter.
The badge of the civil and staid
I'll tear into shreds for the nonce.
I'll take the holy vow to be worthless,
to be drunken and go to the dogs.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XLIII: No, My Friends

No, my friends, I shall never be an
ascetic, whatever you may say.
I shall never be and ascetic if she
does not take the vow with me.
It is my firm resolve that if I
cannot find a shady shelter and a
companion for my penance, I shall
never turn ascetic.
No, my friends, I shall never leave
my hearth and home, and retire into
the forest solitude, if rings no merry
laughter in its echoing shade and if
the end of no saffron mantle flutters
in the wind; if its silence is not
deepened by soft whispers.
I shall never be an ascetic.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XLIV: Reverend Sir, Forgive

Reverend sir, forgive this pair of
sinners. Spring winds to-day are
blowing in wild eddies, driving dust
and dead leaves away, and with them
your lessons are all lost.
Do not say, father, that life is a
vanity.
For we have made truce with death
for once, and only for a few fragrant
hours we two have been made immortal.
Even if the king's army came and
fiercely fell upon us we should sadly
shake our heads and say, Brothers,
you are disturbing us. If you must
have this noisy game, go and clatter
your arms elsewhere. Since only for
a few fleeting moments we have been
made immortal.
If friendly people came and flocked
around us, we should humbly bow to
them and say, This extravagant good
fortune is an embarrassment to us.
Room is scarce in the infinite sky
where we dwell. For in the spring-
time flowers come in crowds, and the
busy wings of bees jostle each other.
Our little heaven, where dwell only
we two immortals, is too absurdly
narrow.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XLV: To the Guests

To the guests that must go bid
God's speed and brush away all traces
of their steps.
    Take to your bosom with a smile
what is easy and simple and near.
    To-day is the festival of phantoms
that know not when they die.
    Let your laughter be but a meaning-
less mirth like twinkles of light on
the ripples.
    Let your life lightly dance on the
edges of Time like dew on the tip of
a leaf.
    Strike in chords from your harp
fitful momentary rhythms.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XLVI: You Left Me

You left me and went on your way.
I thought I should mourn for you
and set your solitary image in my
heart wrought in a golden song.
But ah, my evil fortune, time is
short.
Youth wanes year after year; the
spring days are fugitive; the frail
flowers die for nothing, and the wise
man warns me that life is but a
dewdrop on the lotus leaf.
Should I neglect all this to gaze after
one who has turned her back on me?
That would be rude and foolish,
for time is short.
Then, come, my rainy nights with
pattering feet; smile, my golden
autumn; come, careless April, scatter-
ing your kisses abroad.
You come, and you, and you also!
My loves, you know we are mortals.
Is it wise to break one's heart for the
one who takes her heart away? For
time is short.
It is sweet to sit in a corner to muse
and write in rhymes that you are all
my world.
It is heroic to hug one's sorrow and
determine not to be consoled.
But a fresh face peeps across my
door and raise its eyes to my eyes.
I cannot but wipe away my tears
and change the tune of my song.
For time is short.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XLVIII: Free Me

Free me from the bonds of your sweetness, my love! Nor more of this wine of kisses.

This mist of heavy incense stifles my heart.

Open the doors, make room for the morning light.

I am lost in you, wrapped in the folds of your caresses.

Free me from your spells, and give me back the manhood to offer you my freed heart.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XVI: Hands Cling to Eyes

Hands cling to hands and eyes linger
on eyes: thus begins the record of our
hearts.
It is the moonlit night of March;
the sweet smell of henna is in the air;
my flute lies on the earth neglected
and your garland of flowers is
unfinished.
This love between you and me is
simple as a song.
Your veil of the saffron colour
makes my eyes drunk.
The jasmine wreath that you wove
me thrills to my heart like praise.
It is a game of giving and with-
holding, revealing and screening again;
some smiles and some little shyness,
and some sweet useless struggles.
This love between you and me is
simple as a song.
No mystery beyond the present;
no striving for the impossible; no
shadow behind the charm; no groping
in the depth of the dark.
This love between you and me is
simple as a song.
We do not stray out of all words
into the ever silent; we do not raise
our hands to the void for things
beyond hope.
It is enough what we give and we
get.
We have not crushed the joy to
the utmost to wring from it the wine
of pain.
This love between you and me is
simple as a song.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XVIII: When Two Sisters

When the two sisters go to fetch
water, they come to this spot and
they smile.
They must be aware of somebody
who stands behind the trees when-
ever they go to fetch water.
The two sisters whisper to each
other when they pass this spot.
They must have guessed the secret
of that somebody who stands behind
the trees whenever they go to
fetch water.
Their pitchers lurch suddenly, and
water spills when they reach this
spot.
They must have found out that
somebody's heart is beating who
stands behind the trees whenever
they go to fetch water.
The two sisters glance at each other
when they come to this spot, and they
smile.
There is a laughter in their swift-
stepping feet, which makes confusion
in somebody's mind who stands behind
the trees whenever they go to
fetch water.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XX: Day After Day He Comes

Day after day he comes and goes
away.
Go, and give him a flower from my
hair, my friend.
If he asks who was it that sent it, I
entreat you do not tell him my name--
for he only comes and goes away.
He sits on the dust under the tree.
Spread there a seat with flowers and
leaves, my friend.
His eyes are sad, and they bring
sadness to my heart.
He does not speak what he has in
mind; he only comes and goes away.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XXI: Why Did He Choose

Why did he choose to come to my
door, the wandering youth, when the
day dawned?
As I come in and out I pass by him
every time, and my eyes are caught by
his face.
I know not if I should speak to him
or keep silent. Why did he choose to
come to my door?
The cloudy nights in July are dark;
the sky is soft blue in the autumn; the
spring days are restless with the south
wind.
He weaves his songs with fresh
tunes every time.
I turn from my work and my eyes
fill with the mist. Why did he choose
to come to my door?

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XXII: When She Passed by Me

When she passed by me with quick
steps, the end of her skirt touched
me.
From the unknown island of a
heart came a sudden warm breath of
spring.
A flutter of a flitting touch brushed
me and vanished in a moment, like a
torn flower petal blown in the breeze.
It fell upon my heart like a sigh of
her body and whisper of her heart.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XXIV: Do Not Keep to Yourself

Do not keep to yourself the secret of
your heart, my friend!
Say it to me, only to me, in secret.
You who smile so gently, softly
whisper, my heart will hear it, not my
ears.
The night is deep, the house is
silent, the birds' nests are shrouded
with sleep.
Speak to me through hesitating
tears, through faltering smiles, through
sweet shame and pain, the secret of
your heart!

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XXVI: What Comes From Your Willing Hands

"What comes from your willing
hands I take. I beg for nothing
more."
"Yes, yes, I know you, modest
mendicant, you ask for all that one
has."
"If there be a stray flower for me
I will wear it in my heart."
"But if there be thorns?"
"I will endure them."
"Yes, yes, I know you, modest
mendicant, you ask for all that one
has."
"If but once you should raise your
loving eyes to my face it would make
my life sweet beyond death."
"But if there be only cruel
glances?"
"I will keep them piercing my
heart."
"Yes, yes, I know you, modest
mendicant, you ask for all that one
has."

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XXVII: Trust Love

"Trust love even if it brings sorrow.
Do not close up your heart."
"Ah no, my friend, your words are
dark, I cannot understand them."
"Pleasure is frail like a dewdrop,
while it laughs it dies. But sorrow is
strong and abiding. Let sorrowful
love wake in your eyes."
"Ah no, my friend, your words are
dark, I cannot understand them."
"The lotus blooms in the sight of
the sun, and loses all that it has. It
would not remain in bud in the
eternal winter mist."
"Ah no, my friend, your words are
dark, I cannot understand them."

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XXVIII: Your Questioning Eyes

Your questioning eyes are sad. They
seek to know my meaning as the moon
would fathom the sea.
I have bared my life before your
eyes from end to end, with nothing
hidden or held back. That is why you
know me not.
If it were only a gem, I could break
it into a hundred pieces and string
them into a chain to put on your neck.
If it were only a flower, round and
small and sweet, I could pluck it from
its stem to set it in your hair.
But it is a heart, my beloved.
Where are its shores and its bottom?
You know not the limits of this
kingdom, still you are its queen.
If it were only a moment of pleasure
it would flower in an easy smile, and
you could see it and read it in a
moment.
If it were merely a pain it would
melt in limpid tears, reflecting its
inmost secret without a word.
But it is love, my beloved.
Its pleasure and pain are boundless,
and endless its wants and wealth.
It is as near to you as your life, but
you can never wholly know it.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XXXIV: Do Not Go, My Love

Do not go, my love, without asking
my leave.
I have watched all night, and now
my eyes are heavy with sleep.
I fear lest I lose you when I'm
sleeping.
Do not go, my love, without asking
my leave.
I start up and stretch my hands to
touch you. I ask myself, "Is it a
dream?"
Could I but entangle your feet with
my heart and hold them fast to my
breast!
Do not go, my love, without asking
my leave.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gardener XXXVIII: My Love, Once upon a Time

My love, once upon a time your poet
launched a great epic in his mind.
Alas, I was not careful, and it struck
your ringing anklets and came to
grief.
It broke up into scraps of songs and
lay scattered at your feet.
All my cargo of the stories of old
wars was tossed by the laughing waves
and soaked in tears and sank.
You must make this loss good to me,
my love.
If my claims to immortal fame after
death are scattered, make me immortal
while I live.
And I will not mourn for my loss nor
blame you.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Gift

I want to give you something, my child, for we are drifting in the stream of the world.
Our lives will be carried apart, and our love forgotten.
But I am not so foolish as to hope that I could buy your heart with my gifts.
Young is your life, your path long, and you drink the love we bring you at one draught and turn and run away from us.
You have your play and your playmates. What harm is there if you have no time or thought for us!
We, indeed, have leisure enough in old age to count the days that are past, to cherish in our hearts what our hands have lost for ever.
The river runs swift with a song, breaking through all barriers. But the mountain stays and remembers, and follows her with his love.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Hero

Mother, let us imagine we are travelling, and passing through a strange and dangerous country.
You are riding in a palanquin and I am trotting by you on a red horse.
It is evening and the sun goes down. The waste of Joradighi lies wan and grey before us. The land is desolate and barren.
You are frightened and thinking-"I know not where we have come to."
I say to you, "Mother, do not be afraid."
The meadow is prickly with spiky grass, and through it runs a narrow broken path.
There are no cattle to be seen in the wide field; they have gone to their village stalls.
It grows dark and dim on the land and sky, and we cannot tell where we are going.
Suddenly you call me and ask me in a whisper, "What light is that near the bank?"
Just then there bursts out a fearful yell, and figures come running towards us.
You sit crouched in your palanquin and repeat the names of the gods in prayer.
The bearers, shaking in terror, hide themselves in the thorny bush.
I shout to you, "Don't be afraid, mother. I am here."
With long sticks in their hands and hair all wild about their heads, they come nearer and nearer.
I shout, "Have a care, you villains! One step more and you are dead men."
They give another terrible yell and rush forward.
You clutch my hand and say, "Dear boy, for heaven's sake, keep away from them."
I say, "Mother, just you watch me."
Then I spur my horse for a wild gallop, and my sword and buckler clash against each other.
The fight becomes so fearful, mother, that it would give you a cold shudder could you see it from your palanquin.
Many of them fly, and a great number are cut to pieces.
I know you are thinking, sitting all by yourself, that your boy must be dead by this time.
But I come to you all stained with blood, and say,"Mother, the fight is over now."
You come out and kiss me, pressing me to your heart, and you say to yourself,
"I don't know what I should do if I hadn't my boy to escort me."
A thousand useless things happen day after day, and why couldn't such a thing come true by chance?
It would be like a story in a book.
My brother would say, "Is it possible? I always thought he was so delicate!"
Our village people would all say in amazement, "Was it not lucky that the boy was with his mother?"

Rabindranath Tagore

The Home

I paced alone on the road across the field while the sunset was hiding its last gold like a miser.
The daylight sank deeper and deeper into the darkness, and the widowed land, whose harvest had been reaped, lay silent.
Suddenly a boy's shrill voice rose into the sky. He traversed the dark unseen, leaving the track of his song across the hush of the evening.
His village home lay there at the end of the waste land, beyond the sugar-cane field, hidden among the shadows of the banana and the slender areca palm, the coconut and the dark green jack-fruit trees.
I stopped for a moment in my lonely way under the starlight, and saw spread before me the darkened earth surrounding with her arms countless homes furnished with cradles and beds, mother's hearts and evening lamps, and young lives glad with a gladness that knows nothing of its value for the world.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Journey

The morning sea of silence broke into ripples of bird songs;
and the flowers were all merry by the roadside;
and the wealth of gold was scattered through the rift of the clouds
while we busily went on our way and paid no heed.

We sang no glad songs nor played;
we went not to the village for barter;
we spoke not a word nor smiled;
we lingered not on the way.
We quickened our pace more and more as the time sped by.

The sun rose to the mid sky and doves cooed in the shade.
Withered leaves danced and whirled in the hot air of noon.
The shepherd boy drowsed and dreamed in the shadow of the banyan tree,
and I laid myself down by the water
and stretched my tired limbs on the grass.

My companions laughed at me in scorn;
they held their heads high and hurried on;
they never looked back nor rested;
they vanished in the distant blue haze.

They crossed many meadows and hills,
and passed through strange, far-away countries.
All honor to you, heroic host of the interminable path!
Mockery and reproach pricked me to rise,
but found no response in me.

I gave myself up for lost
in the depth of a glad humiliation
---in the shadow of a dim delight.

The repose of the sun-embroidered green gloom
slowly spread over my heart.
I forgot for what I had traveled,
and I surrendered my mind without struggle
to the maze of shadows and songs.

At last, when I woke from my slumber and opened my eyes,
I saw thee standing by me, flooding my sleep with thy smile.
How I had feared that the path was long and wearisome,
and the struggle to reach thee was hard!

Rabindranath Tagore

The Judge

Say of him what you please, but I know my child's failings.
I do not love him because he is good, but because he is my little child.
How should you know how dear he can be when you try to weigh his merits against his faults?
When I must punish him he becomes all the more a part of my being.
When I cause his tears to come my heart weeps with him.
I alone have a right to blame and punish, for he only may chastise who loves.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Land of the Exile

Mother, the light has grown grey in the sky; I do not know what the time is.
There is no fun in my play, so I have come to you. It is Saturday, our holiday.
Leave off your work, mother; sit here by the window and tell me where the desert of Tepantar in the fairy tale is.
The shadow of the rains has covered the day from end to end.
The fierce lightning is scratching the sky with its nails.
When the clouds rumble and it thunders, I love to be afraid in my heart and cling to you.
When the heavy rain patters for hours on the bamboo leaves, and our windows shake and rattle at the gusts of wind, I like to sit alone in the room, mother, with you, and hear you talk about the desert of Tepantar in the fairy tale.
Where is it, mother, on the shore of what sea, at the foot of what hills, in the kingdom of what king?
There are no hedges there to mark the fields, no footpath across it by which the villagers reach their village in the evening, or the woman who gathers dry sticks in the forest can bring her load to the market. With patches of yellow grass in the sand and only one tree where the pair of wise old birds have their nest, lies the desert of Tepantar.
I can imagine how, on just such a cloudy day, the young son of the king is riding alone on a grey horse through the desert, in search of the princess who lies imprisoned in the giant's palace across that unknown water.
When the haze of the rain comes down in the distant sky, and lightning starts up like a sudden fit of pain, does he remember his unhappy mother, abandoned by the king, sweeping the cow-stall and wiping her eyes, while he rides through the desert of Tepantar in the fairy tale?
See, mother, it is almost dark before the day is over, and thee are no travellers yonder on the village road.
The shepherd boy has gone home early from the pasture, and men have left their fields to sit on mats under the eaves of their huts, watching the scowling clouds.
Mother, I have left all my books on the shelf-do not ask me to do my lessons now.
When I grow up and am bid like my father, I shall learn all that must be learnt.
But just for today, tell me, mother, where the desert of Tepantar in the fairy tale is.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Last Bargain

"Come and hire me," I cried, while in the morning I was walking on the stone-paved road.
Sword in hand, the King came in his chariot.
He held my hand and said, "I will hire you with my power."
But his power counted for nought, and he went away in his chariot.

In the heat of the midday the houses stood with shut doors.
I wandered along the crooked lane.
An old man came out with his bag of gold.
He pondered and said, "I will hire you with my money."
He weighed his coins one by one, but I turned away.

It was evening. The garden hedge was all aflower.
The fair maid came out and said, "I will hire you with a smile."
Her smile paled and melted into tears, and she went back alone into the dark.

The sun glistened on the sand, and the sea waves broke waywardly.
A child sat playing with shells.
He raised his head and seemed to know me, and said, "I hire you with nothing."
From thenceforward that bargain struck in child's play made me a free man.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Little Big Man

I am small because I am a little child. I shall be big when I am as old as my father is.
My teacher will come and say, "It is late, bring your slate and your books."
I shall tell him, " Do you not know I am as big as father? And I must not have lessons any more."
My master will wonder and say, "He can leave his books if he likes, for he is grown up."
I shall dress myself and walk to the fair where the crowd is thick.
My uncle will come rushing up to me and say, "You will get lost, my boy; let me carry you."
I shall answer, "Can't you see, uncle, I am as big as father? I must go to the fair alone."
Uncle will say, "Yes, he can go wherever he likes, for he is grown up."
Mother will come from her bath when I am giving money to my nurse, for I shall know how to open the box with my key.
Mother will say, "What are you about, naughty child?"
I shall tell her, "Mother, don't you know, I am as big as father, and I must give silver to my nurse."
Mother will say to herself, "He can give money to whom he likes, for he is grown up."
In the holiday time in October father will come home and, thinking that I am still a baby, will bring for me from the town little shoes and small silken frocks.
I shall say, "Father, give them to my data, for I am as big as you are."
Father will think and say, "He can buy his own clothes if he likes, for he is grown up."

Rabindranath Tagore

The Lotus

On the day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my mind was straying,
and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded.

Only now and again a sadness fell upon me, and I started up from my
dream and felt a sweet trace of a strange fragrance in the south wind.

That vague sweetness made my heart ache with longing and it seemed to
me that is was the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion.

I knew not then that it was so near, that it was mine, and that this
perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Merchant

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitiation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Rabindranath Tagore

The Rainy Day

Sullen clouds are gathering fast over the black fringe of the forest.
O child, do not go out!
The palm trees in a row by the lake are smiting their heads against the dismal sky; the crows with their dragged wings are silent on the tamarind branches, and the eastern bank of the river is haunted by a deepening gloom.
Our cow is lowing loud, ties at the fence.
O child, wait here till I bring her into the stall.
Men have crowded into the flooded field to catch the fishes as they escape from the overflowing ponds; the rain-water is running in rills through the narrow lanes like a laughing boy who has run away from his mother to tease her.
Listen, someone is shouting for the boatman at the ford.
O child, the daylight is dim, and the crossing at the ferry is closed.
The sky seems to ride fast upon the madly rushing rain; the water in the river is loud and impatient; women have hastened home early from the Ganges with their filled pitchers.
The evening lamps must be made ready.
O child, do not go out!
The road to the market is desolate, the lane to the river is slippery. The wind is roaring and struggling among the bamboo branches like a wild beast tangled in a net.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Recall

The night was dark when she went away, and the slept.
The night is dark now, and I call for her, "Come back, my darling; the world is asleep; and no one would know, if you came for a moment while stars are gazing at stars."
She went away when the trees were in bud and the spring was young.
Now the flowers are in high bloom and I call, "Come back, my darling. The children gather and scatter flowers in reckless sport. And if you come and take one little blossom no one will miss it."
Those that used to play are playing still, so spendthrift is life.
I listen to their chatter and call, "Come back, my darling, for mother's heart is full to the brim with love, and if you come to snatch only one little kiss from her no one will grudge it."

Rabindranath Tagore

The Sailor

The boat of the boatman Madhu is moored at the wharf of Rajgunj.
It is uselessly laden with jute, and has been lying there idle for ever so long.
If he would only lend me his boat, I should man her with a hundred oars, and hoist sails, five or six or seven.
I should never steer her to stupid markets.
I should sail the seven seas and the thirteen rivers of fairyland.
But, mother, you won't weep for me in a corner.
I am not going into the forest like Ramachandra to come back only after fourteen years.
I shall become the prince of the story, and fill my boat with whatever I like.
I shall take my friend Ashu with me. We shall sail merrily across the ever seas and the thirteen rivers of fairyland.
We shall set sail in the early morning light.
When at noontide you are bathing at the pond, we shall be in the land of a strange king.
We shall pass the ford of Tirpurni, and leave behind us the desert of Tepantar.
When we come back it will be getting dark, and I shall tell you of all that we have seen.
I shall cross the seven seas and the thirteen rivers of fairyland.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Source

The sleep that flits on baby's eyes-does anybody know from where
it comes? Yes, there is a rumour that it has its dwelling where,
in the fairy village among shadows of the forest dimly lit with
glow-worms, there hang two shy buds of enchantment. From there it
comes to kiss baby's eyes.
The smile that flickers on baby's lips when he sleeps-does
anybody know where it was born? Yes, there is a rumour that a young
pale beam of a crescent moon touched the edge of a vanishing autumn
cloud, and there the smile was first born in the dream of a dew
washed morning-the smile that flickers on baby's lips when he
sleeps.
The sweet, soft freshness hat blooms on baby's limbs-does
anybody know where it was hidden so long? Yes, when the mother was
a young girl it lay pervading her heart in tender and silent
mystery of love-the sweet, soft freshness that has bloomed on
baby's limbs.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Unheeded Pageant

Ah, who was it coloured that little frock, my child, and covered your sweet limbs with that little red tunic?
You have come out in the morning to play in the courtyard, tottering and tumbling as you run.
But who was it coloured that little frock, my child?
What is it makes you laugh, my little life-bud?
Mother smiles at you standing on the threshold.
She claps her hands and her bracelets jingle, and you dance with your bamboo stick in your hand like a tiny little shepherd.
But what is it makes you laugh, my little life-bud?
O beggar, what do you bed for, clinging to your mother's neck with both your hands?
O greedy heart, shall I pluck the world like a fruit from the sky to place it on your little rosy palm?
O beggar, what are you begging for?
The wind carries away in glee the tinkling of your anklet bells.
The sun smiles and watches your toilet.
The sky watches over you when you sleep in your mother's arms, and the morning comes tiptoe to your bed and kisses your eyes.
The wind carried away in glee the tinkling of your anklet bells.
The fairy mistress of dreams is coming towards you, flying through the twilight sky.
The world-mother keeps her seat by you in your mother's heart.
He who plays his music to the stars is standing at your window with his flute.
And the fairy mistress of dreams is coming towards you, flying through the twilight sky.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Wicked Postman

Why do you sit there on the floor so quiet and silent, tell me, mother dear?
The rain is coming in through the open window, making you all wet, and you don't mind it.
Do you hear the gong striking four? It is time for my brother to come home from school.
What has happened to you that you look so strange?
Haven't you got a letter from father today?
I saw the postman bringing letters in his bag for almost everybody in the town.
Only father's letters he keeps to read himself. I am sure the postman is a wicked man.
But don't be unhappy about that, mother dear.
Tomorrow is market day in the next village. You ask your maid to buy some pens and papers.
I myself will write all father's letters; you will not find a single mistake.
I shall write from A right up to K.
But, mother, why do you smile?
You don't believe that I can write as nicely as father does!
But I shall rule my paper carefully, and write all the letters beautifully big.
When I finish my writing do you think I shall be so foolish as father and drop it into the horrid postman's bag?
I shall bring it to you myself without waiting, and letter by letter help you to read my writing.
I know the postman does not like to give you the really nice letters.

Rabindranath Tagore

Threshold

I was not aware of the moment
when I first crossed the threshold of this life.

What was the power that made me open out into this vast mystery
like a bud in the forest at midnight!

When in the morning I looked upon the light
I felt in a moment that I was no stranger in this world,
that the inscrutable without name and form
had taken me in its arms in the form of my own mother.

Even so, in death the same unknown will appear as ever known to me.
And because I love this life,
I know I shall love death as well.

The child cries out
when from the right breast the mother takes it away,
in the very next moment to find in the left one its consolation.

Rabindranath Tagore

Twelve O'Clock

Mother, I do want to leave off my lessons now. I have been at my
book all the morning.
You say it is only twelve o'clock. Suppose it isn't any later;
can't you ever think it is afternoon when it is only twelve
o'clock?
I can easily imagine now that the sun has reached the edge of
that rice-field, and the old fisher-woman is gathering herbs for
her supper by the side of the pond.
I can just shut my eyes and think that the shadows are growing
darker under the madar tree, and the water in the pond looks shiny
black.
If twelve o'clock can come in the night, why can't the night
come when it is twelve o'clock?

Rabindranath Tagore

Untimely Leave

No more noisy, loud words from me---such is my master's will.
Henceforth I deal in whispers.
The speech of my heart will be carried on in murmurings of a song.

Men hasten to the King's market. All the buyers and sellers are there.
But I have my untimely leave in the middle of the day, in the thick of work.

Let then the flowers come out in my garden, though it is not their time;
and let the midday bees strike up their lazy hum.

Full many an hour have I spent in the strife of the good and the evil,
but now it is the pleasure of my playmate of the empty days to draw my heart on to him;
and I know not why is this sudden call to what useless inconsequence!

Rabindranath Tagore

Vocation

When the gong sounds ten in the morning and I walk to school by our lane.
Every day I meet the hawker crying, "Bangles, crystal bangles!"
There is nothing to hurry him on, there is no road he must take, no place he must go to, no time when he must come home.
I wish I were a hawker, spending my day in the road, crying, "Bangles, crystal bangles!"
When at four in the afternoon I come back from the school,
I can see through the gate of that house the gardener digging the ground.
He does what he likes with his spade, he soils his clothes with dust, nobody takes him to task if he gets baked in the sun or gets wet.
I wish I were a gardener digging away at the garden with nobody to stop me from digging.
Just as it gets dark in the evening and my mother sends me to bed,
I can see through my open window the watchman walking up and down.
The lane is dark and lonely, and the street-lamp stands like a giant with one red eye in its head.
The watchman swings his lantern and walks with his shadow at his side, and never once goes to bed in his life.
I wish I were a watchman walking the streets all night, chasing the shadows with my lantern.

Rabindranath Tagore

When and Why

When I bring you coloured toys, my child, I understand why there
is such a play of colours on clouds, on water, and why flowers are
painted in tints-when I give coloured toys to you, my child.
When I sing to make you dance, I truly know why there is music
in leaves, and why waves send their chorus of voices to the heart
of the listening earth-when I sing to make you dance.
When I bring sweet things to your greedy hands, I know why
there is honey in the cup of the flower, and why fruits are
secretly filled with sweet juice-when I bring sweet things to your
greedy hands.
When I kiss your face to make you smile, my darling, I surely
understand what pleasure streams from the sky in morning light, and
what delight the summer breeze brings to my body-when I kiss you
to make you smile.

Rabindranath Tagore

When Day Is Done

If the day is done,
if birds sing no more,
if the wind has flagged tired,
then draw the veil of darkness thick upon me,
even as thou hast wrapt the earth with the coverlet of sleep
and tenderly closed the petals of the drooping lotus at dusk.

From the traveler,
whose sack of provisions is empty before the voyage is ended,
whose garment is torn and dust-laden,
whose strength is exhausted,
remove shame and poverty,
and renew his life like a flower under the cover of thy kindly night.

Rabindranath Tagore

Where Shadow Chases Light

This is my delight,
thus to wait and watch at the wayside
where shadow chases light
and the rain comes in the wake of the summer.

Messengers, with tidings from unknown skies,
greet me and speed along the road.
My heart is glad within,
and the breath of the passing breeze is sweet.

From dawn till dusk I sit here before my door,
and I know that of a sudden
the happy moment will arrive when I shall see.

In the meanwhile I smile and I sing all alone.
In the meanwhile the air is filling with the perfume of promise.

Rabindranath Tagore

Where The Mind is Without Fear

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake

Rabindranath Tagore

Who Is This

I came out alone on my way to my tryst.
But who is this that follows me in the silent dark?

I move aside to avoid his presence but I escape him not.

He makes the dust rise from the earth with his swagger;
he adds his loud voice to every word that I utter.

He is my own little self, my lord, he knows no shame;
but I am ashamed to come to thy door in his company.

Rabindranath Tagore

Sadhana

Rabindranath Tagore

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SADHANA

THE REALISATION OF LIFE

To

Ernest Rhys

Author's Preface

Perhaps it is well for me to explain that the subject−matter of the papers published in this book has not been philosophically treated, nor has it been approached from the scholar's point of view. The writer has been brought up in a family where texts of the Upanishads are used in daily worship; and he has had before him the example of his father, who lived his long life in the closest communion with God, while not neglecting his duties to the world, or allowing his keen interest in all human affairs to suffer any abatement. So in these papers, it may be hoped, western readers will have an opportunity of coming into touch with the ancient spirit of India as revealed in our sacred texts and manifested in the life of to−day.

All the great utterances of man have to be judged not by the letter but by the spirit—the spirit which unfolds itself with the growth of life in history. We get to know the real meaning of Christianity by observing its living aspect at the present moment—however different that may be, even in important respects, from the Christianity of earlier periods.

For western scholars the great religious scriptures of India seem to possess merely a retrospective and archaelogical interest; but to us they are of living importance, and we cannot help thinking that they lose their significance when exhibited in labelled cases—mummied specimens of human thought and aspiration, preserved for all time in the wrappings of erudition.

The meaning of the living words that come out of the experiences of great hearts can never be exhausted by any one system of logical interpretation. They have to be endlessly explained by the commentaries of individual lives, and they gain an added mystery in each new revelation. To me the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha have ever been things of the spirit, and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth; and I have used them, both in my own life and in my preaching, as being instinct with individual meaning for me, as for others, and awaiting for their confirmation, my own special testimony, which must have its value because of its individuality.

I should add perhaps that these papers embody in a connected form, suited to this publication, ideas which have been culled from several of the Bengali discourses which I am in the habit of giving to my students in my school at Bolpur in Bengal; and I have used here and there translations of passages from these done by my friends, Babu Satish Chandra Roy and Babu Ajit Kumar Chakravarti. The last paper of this series, “Realisation in Action,” has been translated from my Bengali discourse on “Karma− yoga” by my nephew, Babu Surendra Nath Tagore.

I take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to Professor James H. Woods, of Harvard University, for his generous appreciation which encouraged me to complete this series of papers and read most of them before the Harvard University. And I offer my thanks to Mr. Ernest Rhys for his kindness in helping me with suggestions and revisions, and in going through the proofs.

A word may be added about the pronouncing of Sadhana: the accent falls decisively on the first a, which has the broad sound of the letter.

I. THE RELATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE UNIVERSE

The civilisation of ancient Greece was nurtured within city walls. In fact, all the modern civilisations have their cradles of brick and mortar.

These walls leave their mark deep in the minds of men. They set up a principle of “divide and rule” in our mental outlook, which begets in us a habit of securing all our conquests by fortifying them and separating them from one another. We divide nation and nation, knowledge and knowledge, man and nature. It breeds in us a strong suspicion of whatever is beyond the barriers we have built, and everything has to fight hard for its entrance into our recognition.

When the first Aryan invaders appeared in India it was a vast land of forests, and the new−comers rapidly took advantage of them. These forests afforded them shelter from the fierce heat of the sun and the ravages of tropical storms, pastures for cattle, fuel for sacrificial fire, and materials for building cottages. And the different Aryan clans with their patriarchal heads settled in the different forest tracts which had some special advantage of natural protection, and food and water in plenty.

Thus in India it was in the forests that our civilisation had its birth, and it took a distinct character from this origin and environment. It was surrounded by the vast life of nature, was fed and clothed by her, and had the closest and most constant intercourse with her varying aspects.

Such a life, it may be thought, tends to have the effect of dulling human intelligence and dwarfing the incentives to progress by lowering the standards of existence. But in ancient India we find that the circumstances of forest life did not overcome man's mind, and did not enfeeble the current of his energies, but only gave to it a particular direction. Having been in constant contact with the living growth of nature, his mind was free from the desire to extend his dominion by erecting boundary walls around his acquisitions. His aim was not to acquire but to realise, to enlarge his consciousness by growing with and growing into his

surroundings. He felt that truth is all−comprehensive, that there is no such thing as absolute isolation in existence, and the only way of attaining truth is through the interpenetration of our being into all objects. To realise this great harmony between man's spirit and the spirit of the world was the endeavour of the forest−dwelling sages of ancient India.

In later days there came a time when these primeval forests gave way to cultivated fields, and wealthy cities sprang up on all sides. Mighty kingdoms were established, which had communications with all the great powers of the world. But even in the heyday of its material prosperity the heart of India ever looked back with adoration upon the early ideal of strenuous self−realisation, and the dignity of the simple life of the forest hermitage, and drew its best inspiration from the wisdom stored there.

The west seems to take a pride in thinking that it is subduing nature; as if we are living in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything we want from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things. This sentiment is the product of the city−wall habit and training of mind. For in the city life man naturally directs the concentrated light of his mental vision upon his own life and works, and this creates an artificial dissociation between himself and the Universal Nature within whose bosom he lies.

But in India the point of view was different; it included the world with the man as one great truth. India put all her emphasis on the harmony that exists between the individual and the universal. She felt we could have no communication whatever with our surroundings if they were absolutely foreign to us. Man's complaint against nature is that he has to acquire most of his necessaries by his own efforts. Yes, but his efforts are not in vain; he is reaping success every day, and that shows there is a rational connection between him and nature, for we never can make anything our own except that which is truly related to us.

We can look upon a road from two different points of view. One regards it as dividing us from the object of our desire; in that case we count every step of our journey over it as something attained by force in the face of obstruction. The other sees it as the road which leads us to our destination; and as such it is part of our goal. It is already the beginning of our attainment, and by journeying over it we can only gain that which in itself it offers to us. This last point of view is that of India with regard to nature. For her, the great fact is that we are in harmony with nature; that man can think because his thoughts are in harmony with things; that he can use the forces of nature for his own purpose only because his power is in harmony with the power which is universal, and that in the long run his purpose never can knock against the purpose which works through nature.

In the west the prevalent feeling is that nature belongs exclusively to inanimate things and to beasts, that there is a sudden unaccountable break where human−nature begins. According to it, everything that is low in the scale of beings is merely nature, and whatever has the stamp of perfection on it, intellectual or moral, is human−nature. It is like dividing the bud and the blossom into two separate categories, and putting their grace to the credit of two different and antithetical principles. But the Indian mind never has any hesitation in acknowledging its kinship with nature, its unbroken relation with all.

The fundamental unity of creation was not simply a philosophical speculation for India; it was her life−object to realise this great harmony in feeling and in action. With mediation and service, with a regulation of life, she cultivated her consciousness in such a way that everything had a spiritual meaning to her. The earth, water and light, fruits and flowers, to her were not merely physical phenomena to be turned to use and then left aside. They were necessary to her in the attainment of her ideal of perfection, as every note is necessary to the completeness of the symphony. India intuitively felt that the essential fact of this world has a vital meaning for us; we have to be fully alive to it and establish a conscious relation with it, not merely impelled by scientific curiosity or greed of material advantage, but realising it in the spirit of sympathy, with a large feeling of joy and peace.

The man of science knows, in one aspect, that the world is not merely what it appears to be to our senses; he knows that earth and water are really the play of forces that manifest themselves to us as earth and water—how, we can but partially apprehend. Likewise the man who has his spiritual eyes open knows that the ultimate truth about earth and water lies in our apprehension of the eternal will which works in time and takes shape in the forces we realise under those aspects. This is not mere knowledge, as science is, but it is a preception of the soul by the soul. This does not lead us to power, as knowledge does, but it gives us joy, which is the product of the union of kindred things. The man whose acquaintance with the world does not lead him deeper than science leads him, will never understand what it is that the man with the spiritual vision finds in these natural phenomena. The water does not merely cleanse his limbs, but it purifies his heart; for it touches his soul. The earth does not merely hold his body, but it gladdens his mind; for its contact is more than a physical contact—it is a living presence. When a man does not realise his kinship with the world, he lives in a prison−house whose walls are alien to him. When he meets the eternal spirit in all objects, then is he emancipated, for then he discovers the fullest significance of the world into which he is born; then he finds himself in perfect truth, and his harmony with the all is established. In India men are enjoined to be fully awake to the fact that they are in the closest relation to things around them, body and soul, and that they are to hail the morning sun, the flowing water, the fruitful earth, as the manifestation of the same living truth which holds them in its embrace. Thus the text of our everyday meditation is the *Gayathri*, a verse which is considered to be the epitome of all the Vedas. By its help we try to realise the essential unity of the world with the conscious soul of man; we learn to perceive the unity held together by the one Eternal Spirit, whose power creates the earth, the sky, and the stars, and at the same time irradiates our minds with the light of a consciousness that moves and exists in unbroken continuity with the outer world.

It is not true that India has tried to ignore differences of value in different things, for she knows that would make life impossible. The sense of the superiority of man in the scale of creation has not been absent from her mind. But she has had her own idea as to that in which his superiority really consists. It is not in the power of possession but in the power of union. Therefore India chose her places of pilgrimage wherever there was in nature some special grandeur or beauty, so that her mind could come out of its world of narrow necessities and realise its place in the infinite. This was the reason why in India a whole people who once were meat−eaters gave up taking animal food to cultivate the sentiment of universal sympathy for life, an event unique in the history of mankind.

India knew that when by physical and mental barriers we violently detach ourselves from the inexhaustible life of nature; when we become merely man, but not man−in−the−universe, we create bewildering problems, and having shut off the source of their solution, we try all kinds of artificial methods each of which brings its own crop of interminable difficulties. When man leaves his resting−place in universal nature, when he walks on the single rope of humanity, it means either a dance or a fall for him, he has ceaselessly to strain every nerve and muscle to keep his balance at each step, and then, in the intervals of his weariness, he fulminates against Providence and feels a secret pride and satisfaction in thinking that he has been unfairly dealt with by the whole scheme of things.

But this cannot go on for ever. Man must realise the wholeness of his existence, his place in the infinite; he must know that hard as he may strive he can never create his honey within the cells of his hive; for the perennial supply of his life food is outside their walls. He must know that when man shuts himself out from the vitalising and purifying touch of the infinite, and falls back upon himself for his sustenance and his healing, then he goads himself into madness, tears himself into shreds, and eats his own substance. Deprived of the background of the whole, his poverty loses its one great quality, which is simplicity, and becomes squalid and shamefaced. His wealth is no longer magnanimous; it grows merely extravagant. His appetites do not minister to his life, keeping to the limits of their purpose; they become an end in themselves and set fire to his life and play the fiddle in the lurid light of the conflagration. Then it is that in our self−expression we try to startle and not to attract; in art we strive for originality and lose sight of truth which is old and yet ever new; in literature we miss the complete view of man which is simple and yet great, but he appears as a

psychological problem or the embodiment of a passion that is intense because abnormal and because exhibited in the glare of a fiercely emphatic light which is artificial. When man's consciousness is restricted only to the immediate vicinity of his human self, the deeper roots of his nature do not find their permanent soil, his spirit is ever on the brink of starvation, and in the place of healthful strength he substitutes rounds of stimulation. Then it is that man misses his inner perspective and measures his greatness by its bulk and not by its vital link with the infinite, judges his activity by its movement and not by the repose of perfection—the repose which is in the starry heavens, in the ever−flowing rhythmic dance of creation.

The first invasion of India has its exact parallel in the invasion of America by the European settlers. They also were confronted with primeval forests and a fierce struggle with aboriginal races. But this struggle between man and man, and man and nature lasted till the very end; they never came to any terms. In India the forests which were the habitation of the barbarians became the sanctuary of sages, but in America these great living cathedrals of nature had no deeper significance to man. The brought wealth and power to him, and perhaps at times they ministered to his enjoyment of beauty, and inspired a solitary poet. They never acquired a sacred association in the hearts of men as the site of some great spiritual reconcilement where man's soul has its meeting−place with the soul of the world.

I do not for a moment wish to suggest that these things should have been otherwise. It would be an utter waste of opportunities if history were to repeat itself exactly in the same manner in every place. It is best for the commerce of the spirit that people differently situated should bring their different products into the market of humanity, each of which is complementary and necessary to the others. All that I wish to say is that India at the outset of her career met with a special combination of circumstances which was not lost upon her. She had, according to her opportunities, thought and pondered, striven and suffered, dived into the depths of existence, and achieved something which surely cannot be without its value to people whose evolution in history took a different way altogether. Man for his perfect growth requires all the living elements that constitute his complex life; that is why his food has to be cultivated in different fields and brought from different sources.

Civilisation is a kind of mould that each nation is busy making for itself to shape its men and women according to its best ideal. All its institutions, its legislature, its standard of approbation and condemnation, its conscious and unconscious teachings tend toward that object. The modern civilisation of the west, by all its organised efforts, is trying to turn out men perfect in physical, intellectual, and moral efficiency. There the vast energies of the nations are employed in extending man's power over his surroundings, and people are combining and straining every faculty to possess and to turn to account all that they can lay their hands upon, to overcome every obstacle on their path of conquest. They are ever disciplining themselves to fight nature and other races; their armaments are getting more and more stupendous every day; their machines, their appliances, their organisations go on multiplying at an amazing rate. This is a splendid achievement, no doubt, and a wonderful manifestation of man's masterfulness which knows no obstacle, and which has for its object the supremacy of himself over everything else.

The ancient civilisation of India had its own ideal of perfection towards which its efforts were directed. Its aim was not attaining power, and it neglected to cultivate to the utmost its capacities, and to organise men for defensive and offensive purposes, for co−operation in the acquisition of wealth and for military and political ascendancy. The ideal that India tried to realise led her best men to the isolation of a contemplative life, and the treasures that she gained for mankind by penetrating into the mysteries of reality cost her dear in the sphere of worldly success. Yet, this also was a sublime achievement,—it was a supreme manifestation of that human aspiration which knows no limit, and which has for its object nothing less than the realisation of the Infinite.

There were the virtuous, the wise, the courageous; there were the statesmen, kings and emperors of India; but whom amongst all these classes did she look up to and choose to be the representative of men?

They were the rishis. What were the rishis? *They who having attained the supreme soul in knowledge were filled with wisdom, and having found him in union with the soul were in perfect harmony with the inner self; they having realised him in the heart were free from all selfish desires, and having experienced him in all the activities of the world, had attained calmness. The rishis were they who having reached the supreme God from all sides had found abiding peace, had become united with all, had entered into the life of the Universe.* [Footnote: /**
Samprapyainam rishayo jnanatripatah
Kritatmano vitaragah pracantah
te sarvagam sarvatah prapya dhirah
Yuktatmanah sarvamevavicanti. */]

Thus the state of realising our relationship with all, of entering into everything through union with God, was considered in India to be the ultimate end and fulfilment of humanity.

Man can destroy and plunder, earn and accumulate, invent and discover, but he is great because his soul comprehends all. It is dire destruction for him when he envelopes his soul in a dead shell of callous habits, and when a blind fury of works whirls round him like an eddying dust storm, shutting out the horizon. That indeed kills the very spirit of his being, which is the spirit of comprehension. Essentially man is not a slave either of himself or of the world; but he is a lover. His freedom and fulfilment is in love, which is another name for perfect comprehension. By this power of comprehension, this permeation of his being, he is united with the all−pervading Spirit, who is also the breath of his soul. Where a man tries to raise himself to eminence by pushing and jostling all others, to achieve a distinction by which he prides himself to be more than everybody else, there he is alienated from that Spirit. This is why the Upanishads describe those who have attained the goal of human life as "*peaceful* " [Footnote: Pracantah] and as "*at−one−with− God*," [Footnote: Yuktatmanah] meaning that they are in perfect harmony with man and nature, and therefore in undisturbed union with God.

We have a glimpse of the same truth in the teachings of Jesus when he says, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven"— which implies that whatever we treasure for ourselves separates us from others; our possessions are our limitations. He who is bent upon accumulating riches is unable, with his ego continually bulging, to pass through the gates of comprehension of the spiritual world, which is the world of perfect harmony; he is shut up within the narrow walls of his limited acquisitions.

Hence the spirit of the teachings of Upanishad is: In order to find him you must embrace all. In the pursuit of wealth you really give up everything to gain a few things, and that is not the way to attain him who is completeness.

Some modern philosophers of Europe, who are directly or indirectly indebted to the Upanishads, far from realising their debt, maintain that the Brahma of India is a mere abstraction, a negation of all that is in the world. In a word, that the Infinite Being is to be found nowhere except in metaphysics. It may be, that such a doctrine has been and still is prevalent with a section of our countrymen. But this is certainly not in accord with the pervading spirit of the Indian mind. Instead, it is the practice of realising and affirming the presence of the infinite in all things which has been its constant inspiration.

We are enjoined to see *whatever there is in the world as being enveloped by God.* [Footnote: Icavasyamidam sarvam yat kincha jagatyan jagat.]

I bow to God over and over again who is in fire and in water, who permeates the whole world, who is in the annual crops as well as in the perennial trees. [Footnote: Yo devo'gnau y'opsu y'o vicvambhuvanamaviveca ya oshadhishu yo vanaspatishu tasmai devaya namonamah.]

Can this be God abstracted from the world? Instead, it signifies not merely seeing him in all things, but saluting him in all the objects of the world. The attitude of the God−conscious man of the Upanishad towards the universe is one of a deep feeling of adoration. His object of worship is present everywhere. It is the one living truth that makes all realities true. This truth is not only of knowledge but of devotion. '*Namonamah*,'—we bow to him everywhere, and over and over again. It is recognised in the outburst of the Rishi, who addresses the whole world in a sudden ecstasy of joy: *Listen to me, ye sons of the immortal spirit, ye who live in the heavenly abode, I have known the Supreme Person whose light shines forth from beyond the darkness.* [Footnote: Crinvantu vicve amritasya putra a ye divya dhamani tasthuh vedahametam purusham mahantam aditya varnam tamasah parastat.] Do we not find the overwhelming delight of a direct and positive experience where there is not the least trace of vagueness or passivity?

Buddha who developed the practical side of the teaching of Upanishads, preached the same message when he said, *With everything, whether it is above or below, remote or near, visible or invisible, thou shalt preserve a relation of unlimited love without any animosity or without a desire to kill. To live in such a consciousness while standing or walking, sitting or lying down till you are asleep, is Brahma vihara, or, in other words, is living and moving and having your joy in the spirit of Brahma.*

What is that spirit? The Upanishad says, *The being who is in his essence the light and life of all, who is world−conscious, is Brahma.* [Footnote: Yacchayamasminnakace tejomayo'mritamayah purushah sarvanubhuh.] To feel all, to be conscious of everything, is his spirit. We are immersed in his consciousness body and soul. It is through his consciousness that the sun attracts the earth; it is through his consciousness that the light−waves are being transmitted from planet to planet.

Not only in space, but *this light and life, this all−feeling being is in our souls.* [Footnote: Yacchayamasminnatmani tejomayo'mritamayah purushah sarvanubhuh.] He is all−conscious in space, or the world of extension; and he is all−conscious in soul, or the world of intension.

Thus to attain our world−consciousness, we have to unite our feeling with this all−pervasive infinite feeling. In fact, the only true human progress is coincident with this widening of the range of feeling. All our poetry, philosophy, science, art and religion are serving to extend the scope of our consciousness towards higher and larger spheres. Man does not acquire rights through occupation of larger space, nor through external conduct, but his rights extend only so far as he is real, and his reality is measured by the scope of his consciousness.

We have, however, to pay a price for this attainment of the freedom of consciousness. What is the price? It is to give one's self away. Our soul can realise itself truly only by denying itself. The Upanishad says, *Thou shalt gain by giving away* [Footnote: Tyaktena bhunjithah], *Thou shalt not covet.* [Footnote: Ma gridhah]

In Gita we are advised to work disinterestedly, abandoning all lust for the result. Many outsiders conclude from this teaching that the conception of the world as something unreal lies at the root of the so−called disinterestedness preached in India. But the reverse is true.

The man who aims at his own aggrandisement underrates everything else. Compared to his ego the rest of the world is unreal. Thus in order to be fully conscious of the reality of all, one has to be free himself from the bonds of personal desires. This discipline we have to go through to prepare ourselves for our social duties—for sharing the burdens of our fellow−beings. Every endeavour to attain a larger life requires of man "to gain by giving away, and not to be greedy." And thus to expand gradually the consciousness of one's unity with all is the striving of humanity.

The Infinite in India was not a thin nonentity, void of all content. The Rishis of India asserted emphatically, "To know him in this life is to be true; not to know him in this life is the desolation of death." [Footnote: Iha chet avedit atha satyamasti, nachet iha avedit mahati vinashtih.] How to know him then? "By realising him in

each and all.” [Footnote: Bhuteshu bhuteshu vichintva.] Not only in nature but in the family, in society, and in the state, the more we realise the World−conscious in all, the better for us. Failing to realise it, we turn our faces to destruction.

It fills me with great joy and a high hope for the future of humanity when I realise that there was a time in the remote past when our poet−prophets stood under the lavish sunshine of an Indian sky and greeted the world with the glad recognition of kindred. It was not an anthropomorphic hallucination. It was not seeing man reflected everywhere in grotesquely exaggerated images, and witnessing the human drama acted on a gigantic scale in nature's arena of flitting lights and shadows. On the contrary, it meant crossing the limiting barriers of the individual, to become more than man, to become one with the All. It was not a mere play of the imagination, but it was the liberation of consciousness from all the mystifications and exaggerations of the self. These ancient seers felt in the serene depth of their mind that the same energy which vibrates and passes into the endless forms of the world manifests itself in our inner being as consciousness; and there is no break in unity. For these seers there was no gap in their luminous vision of perfection. They never acknowledged even death itself as creating a chasm in the field of reality. They said, *His reflection is death as well as immortality.* [Footnote: Yasya chhayamritam yasya mrityuh.] They did not recognise any essential opposition between life and death, and they said with absolute assurance, “It is life that is death.” [Footnote: Prano mrityuh.] They saluted with the same serenity of gladness “life in its aspect of appearing and in its aspect of departure”— *That which is past is hidden in life, and that which is to come.* [Footnote: Namo astu ayate namo astu parayate. Prane ha bhutam bhavyancha.] They knew that mere appearance and disappearance are on the surface like waves on the sea, but life which is permanent knows no decay or diminution.

Everything has sprung from immortal life and is vibrating with life, [Footnote: Yadidan kincha prana ejati nihsritam.] *for life is immense.* [Footnote: Prano virat.]

This is the noble heritage from our forefathers waiting to be claimed by us as our own, this ideal of the supreme freedom of consciousness. It is not merely intellectual or emotional, it has an ethical basis, and it must be translated into action. In the Upanishad it is said, *The supreme being is all−pervading, therefore he is the innate good in all.* [Footnote: Sarvavyapi sa bhagavan tasmat sarvagatah civah.] To be truly united in knowledge, love, and service with all beings, and thus to realise one's self in the all−pervading God is the essence of goodness, and this is the keynote of the teachings of the Upanishads: *Life is immense!* [Footnote: Prano virat.]

II. SOUL CONSCIOUSNESS

We have seen that it was the aspiration of ancient India to live and move and have its joy in Brahma, the all−conscious and all− pervading Spirit, by extending its field of consciousness over all the world. But that, it may be urged, is an impossible task for man to achieve. If this extension of consciousness be an outward process, then it is endless; it is like attempting to cross the ocean after ladling out its water. By beginning to try to realise all, one has to end by realising nothing.

But, in reality, it is not so absurd as it sounds. Man has every day to solve this problem of enlarging his region and adjusting his burdens. His burdens are many, too numerous for him to carry, but he knows that by adopting a system he can lighten the weight of his load. Whenever they feel too complicated and unwieldy, he knows it is because he has not been able to hit upon the system which would have set everything in place and distributed the weight evenly. This search for system is really a search for unity, for synthesis; it is our attempt to harmonise the heterogeneous complexity of outward materials by an inner adjustment. In the search we gradually become aware that to find out the One is to possess the All; that there, indeed, is our last and highest privilege. It is based on the law of that unity which is, if we only know it, our abiding strength. Its living principle is the power that is in truth; the truth of that unity which comprehends multiplicity. Facts are many,

but the truth is one. The animal intelligence knows facts, the human mind has power to apprehend truth. The apple falls from the tree, the rain descends upon the earth—you can go on burdening your memory with such facts and never come to an end. But once you get hold of the law of gravitation you can dispense with the necessity of collecting facts *ad infinitum*. You have got at one truth which governs numberless facts. This discovery of truth is pure joy to man—it is a liberation of his mind. For, a mere fact is like a blind lane, it leads only to itself—it has no beyond. But a truth opens up a whole horizon, it leads us to the infinite. That is the reason why, when a man like Darwin discovers some simple general truth about Biology, it does not stop there, but like a lamp shedding its light far beyond the object for which it was lighted, it illumines the whole region of human life and thought, transcending its original purpose. Thus we find that truth, while investing all facts, is not a mere aggregate of facts—it surpasses them on all sides and points to the infinite reality.

As in the region of knowledge so in that of consciousness, man must clearly realise some central truth which will give him an outlook over the widest possible field. And that is the object which the Upanishad has in view when it says, *Know thine own Soul*. Or, in other words, realise the one great principal of unity that there is in every man.

All our egoistic impulses, our selfish desires, obscure our true vision of the soul. For they only indicate our own narrow self. When we are conscious of our soul, we perceive the inner being that transcends our ego and has its deeper affinity with the All.

Children, when they begin to learn each separate letter of the alphabet, find no pleasure in it, because they miss the real purpose of the lesson; in fact, while letters claim our attention only in themselves and as isolated things, they fatigue us. They become a source of joy to us only when they combine into words and sentences and convey an idea.

Likewise, our soul when detached and imprisoned within the narrow limits of a self loses its significance. For its very essence is unity. It can only find out its truth by unifying itself with others, and only then it has its joy. Man was troubled and he lived in a state of fear so long as he had not discovered the uniformity of law in nature; till then the world was alien to him. The law that he discovered is nothing but the perception of harmony that prevails between reason which is of the soul of man and the workings of the world. This is the bond of union through which man is related to the world in which he lives, and he feels an exceeding joy when he finds this out, for then he realises himself in his surroundings. To understand anything is to find in it something which is our own, and it is the discovery of ourselves outside us which makes us glad. This relation of understanding is partial, but the relation of love is complete. In love the sense of difference is obliterated and the human soul fulfils its purpose in perfection, transcending the limits of itself and reaching across the threshold of the infinite. Therefore love is the highest bliss that man can attain to, for through it alone he truly knows that he is more than himself, and that he is at one with the All.

This principal of unity which man has in his soul is ever active, establishing relations far and wide through literature, art, and science, society, statecraft, and religion. Our great Revealers are they who make manifest the true meaning of the soul by giving up self for the love of mankind. They face calumny and persecution, deprivation and death in their service of love. They live the life of the soul, not of the self, and thus they prove to us the ultimate truth of humanity. We call them *Mahatmas*, “the men of the great soul.”

It is said in one of the Upanishads: *It is not that thou lovest thy son because thou desirest him, but thou lovest thy son because thou desirest thine own soul.* [Footnote: Na va are putrasya kamaya putrah priyo bhavati, atmanastu kamaya putrah priyo bhavati.] The meaning of this is, that whomsoever we love, in him we find our own soul in the highest sense. The final truth of our existence lies in this. *Paramatma*, the supreme soul, is in me, as well as in my son, and my joy in my son is the realisation of this truth. It has become quite a commonplace fact, yet it is wonderful to think upon, that the joys and sorrows of our loved ones are joys and sorrows to us—nay they are more. Why so? Because in them we have grown larger, in them we have touched

that great truth which comprehends the whole universe.

It very often happens that our love for our children, our friends, or other loved ones, debars us from the further realisation of our soul. It enlarges our scope of consciousness, no doubt, yet it sets a limit to its freest expansion. Nevertheless, it is the first step, and all the wonder lies in this first step itself. It shows to us the true nature of our soul. From it we know, for certain, that our highest joy is in the losing of our egoistic self and in the uniting with others. This love gives us a new power and insight and beauty of mind to the extent of the limits we set around it, but ceases to do so if those limits lose their elasticity, and militate against the spirit of love altogether; then our friendships become exclusive, our families selfish and inhospitable, our nations insular and aggressively inimical to other races. It is like putting a burning light within a sealed enclosure, which shines brightly till the poisonous gases accumulate and smother the flame. Nevertheless it has proved its truth before it dies, and made known the joy of freedom from the grip of darkness, blind and empty and cold.

According to the Upanishads, the key to cosmic consciousness, to God−consciousness, is in the consciousness of the soul. To know our soul apart from the self is the first step towards the realisation of the supreme deliverance. We must know with absolute certainty that essentially we are spirit. This we can do by winning mastery over self, by rising above all pride and greed and fear, by knowing that worldly losses and physical death can take nothing away from the truth and the greatness of our soul. The chick knows when it breaks through the self−centered isolation of its egg that the hard shell which covered it so long was not really a part of its life. That shell is a dead thing, it has no growth, it affords no glimpse whatever of the vast beyond that lies outside it. However pleasantly perfect and rounded it may be, it must be given a blow to, it must be burst through and thereby the freedom of light and air be won, and the complete purpose of bird life be achieved. In Sanskrit, the bird has been called the twice−born. So too the man who has gone through the ceremony of the discipline of self−restraint and high thinking for a period of at least twelve years; who has come out simple in wants, pure in heart, and ready to take up all the responsibilities of life in a disinterested largeness of spirit. He is considered to have had his rebirth from the blind envelopment of self to the freedom of soul life; to have come into living relation with his surroundings; to have become at one with the All.

I have already warned my hearers, and must once more warn them against the idea that the teachers of India preached a renunciation of the world and of self which leads only to the blank emptiness of negation. Their aim was the realisation of the soul, or, in other words, gaining the world in perfect truth. When Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,” he meant this. He proclaimed the truth that when man gets rid of his pride of self then he comes into his true inheritance. No more has he to fight his way into his position in the world; it is secure for him everywhere by the immortal right of his soul. Pride of self interferes with the proper function of the soul which is to realise itself by perfecting its union with the world and the world's God.

In his sermon to Sadhu Simha Buddha says, *It is true, Simha, that I denounce activities, but only the activities that lead to the evil in words, thoughts, or deeds. It is true, Simha, that I preach extinction, but only the extinction of pride, lust, evil thought, and ignorance, not that of forgiveness, love, charity, and truth.*

The doctrine of deliverance that Buddha preached was the freedom from the thraldom of *Avidya*. *Avidya* is the ignorance that darkens our consciousness, and tends to limit it within the boundaries of our personal self. It is this *Avidya*, this ignorance, this limiting of consciousness that creates the hard separateness of the ego, and thus becomes the source of all pride and greed and cruelty incidental to self−seeking. When a man sleeps he is shut up within the narrow activities of his physical life. He lives, but he knows not the varied relations of his life to his surroundings,—therefore he knows not himself. So when a man lives the life of *Avidya* he is confined within his self. It is a spiritual sleep; his consciousness is not fully awake to the highest reality that surrounds him, therefore he knows not the reality of his own soul. When he attains *Bodhi*, i.e. the awakenment from the sleep of self to the perfection of consciousness, he becomes Buddha.

Once I met two ascetics of a certain religious sect in a village of Bengal. “Can you tell me,” I asked them, “wherein lies the special features of your religion?” One of them hesitated for a moment and answered, “It is difficult to define that.” The other said, “No, it is quite simple. We hold that we have first of all to know our own soul under the guidance of our spiritual teacher, and when we have done that we can find him, who is the Supreme Soul, within us.” “Why don't you preach your doctrine to all the people of the world?” I asked. “Whoever feels thirsty will of himself come to the river,” was his reply. “But then, do you find it so? Are they coming?” The man gave a gentle smile, and with an assurance which had not the least tinge of impatience or anxiety, he said, “They must come, one and all.”

Yes, he is right, this simple ascetic of rural Bengal. Man is indeed abroad to satisfy needs which are more to him than food and clothing. He is out to find himself. Man's history is the history of his journey to the unknown in quest of the realisation of his immortal self—his soul. Through the rise and fall of empires; through the building up gigantic piles of wealth and the ruthless scattering of them upon the dust; through the creation of vast bodies of symbols that give shape to his dreams and aspirations, and the casting of them away like the playthings of an outworn infancy; through his forging of magic keys with which to unlock the mysteries of creation, and through his throwing away of this labour of ages to go back to his workshop and work up afresh some new form; yes, through it all man is marching from epoch to epoch towards the fullest realisation of his soul,—the soul which is greater than the things man accumulates, the deeds he accomplishes, the theories he builds; the soul whose onward course is never checked by death or dissolution. Man's mistakes and failures have by no means been trifling or small, they have strewn his path with colossal ruins; his sufferings have been immense, like birth−pangs for a giant child; they are the prelude of a fulfilment whose scope is infinite. Man has gone through and is still undergoing martyrdoms in various ways, and his institutions are the altars he has built whereto he brings his daily sacrifices, marvellous in kind and stupendous in quantity. All this would be absolutely unmeaning and unbearable if all along he did not feel that deepest joy of the soul within him, which tries its divine strength by suffering and proves its exhaustless riches by renunciation. Yes, they are coming, the pilgrims, one and all—coming to their true inheritance of the world; they are ever broadening their consciousness, ever seeking a higher and higher unity, ever approaching nearer to the one central Truth which is all−comprehensive.

Man's poverty is abysmal, his wants are endless till he becomes truly conscious of his soul. Till then, the world to him is in a state of continual flux—a phantasm that is and is not. For a man who has realised his soul there is a determinate centre of the universe around which all else can find its proper place, and from thence only can he draw and enjoy the blessedness of a harmonious life.

There was a time when the earth was only a nebulous mass whose particles were scattered far apart through the expanding force of heat; when she had not yet attained her definiteness of form and had neither beauty nor purpose, but only heat and motion. Gradually, when her vapours were condensed into a unified rounded whole through a force that strove to bring all straggling matters under the control of a centre, she occupied her proper place among the planets of the solar system, like an emerald pendant in a necklace of diamonds. So with our soul. When the heat and motion of blind impulses and passions distract it on all sides, we can neither give nor receive anything truly. But when we find our centre in our soul by the power of self−restraint, by the force that harmonises all warring elements and unifies those that are apart, then all our isolated impressions reduce themselves to wisdom, and all our momentary impulses of heart find their completion in love; then all the petty details of our life reveal an infinite purpose, and all our thoughts and deeds unite themselves inseparably in an internal harmony.

The Upanishads say with great emphasis, *Know thou the One, the Soul.* [Footnote: Tamevaikam janatha atmanam.] *It is the bridge leading to the immortal being.* [Footnote: Amritasyaisha setuh.]

This is the ultimate end of man, to find the *One* which is in him; which is his truth, which is his soul; the key with which he opens the gate of the spiritual life, the heavenly kingdom. His desires are many, and madly they

run after the varied objects of the world, for therein they have their life and fulfilment. But that which is *one* in him is ever seeking for unity—unity in knowledge, unity in love, unity in purposes of will; its highest joy is when it reaches the infinite one within its eternal unity. Hence the saying of the Upanishad, *Only those of tranquil minds, and none else, can attain abiding joy, by realising within their souls the Being who manifests one essence in a multiplicity of forms.* [Footnote: Ekam rupam bahudha yah karoti * * tam atmastham ye anupacyanti dihrah, tesham sukham cacvatam netaresham.]

[Transcriber's note: The above footnote contains the * mark in the original printed version. This has been retained as is.]

Through all the diversities of the world the one in us is threading its course towards the one in all; this is its nature and this is its joy. But by that devious path it could never reach its goal if it had not a light of its own by which it could catch the sight of what it was seeking in a flash. The vision of the Supreme One in our own soul is a direct and immediate intuition, not based on any ratiocination or demonstration at all. Our eyes naturally see an object as a whole, not by breaking it up into parts, but by bringing all the parts together into a unity with ourselves. So with the intuition of our Soul−consciousness, which naturally and totally realises its unity in the Supreme One.

Says the Upanishad: *This deity who is manifesting himself in the activities of the universe always dwells in the heart of man as the supreme soul. Those who realise him through the immediate perception of the heart attain immortality.* [Footnote: Esha devo vishvakarma mahatma sada jananam hridaye sannivishtah. Hrida manisha manasabhiklripto ya etad viduramritaste bhavanti.]

He is *Vishvakarma*; that is, in a multiplicity of forms and forces lies his outward manifestation in nature; but his inner manifestation in our soul is that which exists in unity. Our pursuit of truth in the domain of nature therefore is through analysis and the gradual methods of science, but our apprehension of truth in our soul is immediate and through direct intuition. We cannot attain the supreme soul by successive additions of knowledge acquired bit by bit even through all eternity, because he is one, he is not made up of parts; we can only know him as heart of our hearts and soul of our soul; we can only know him in the love and joy we feel when we give up our self and stand before him face to face.

The deepest and the most earnest prayer that has ever risen from the human heart has been uttered in our ancient tongue: *O thou self−revealing one, reveal thyself in me.* [Footnote: Aviravirmayedhi.] We are in misery because we are creatures of self—the self that is unyielding and narrow, that reflects no light, that is blind to the infinite. Our self is loud with its own discordant clamour—it is not the tuned harp whose chords vibrate with the music of the eternal. Sighs of discontent and weariness of failure, idle regrets for the past and anxieties for the future are troubling our shallow hearts because we have not found our souls, and the self−revealing spirit has not been manifest within us. Hence our cry, *O thou awful one, save me with thy smile of grace ever and evermore.* [Footnote: Rudra yat te dakshinam mukham tena mam pahi nityam.] It is a stifling shroud of death, this self−gratification, this insatiable greed, this pride of possession, this insolent alienation of heart. *Rudra, O thou awful one, rend this dark cover in twain and let the saving beam of thy smile of grace strike through this night of gloom and waken my soul.*

From unreality lead me to the real, from darkness to the light, from death to immortality. [Footnote: Asatoma sadgamaya, tamasoma jyotirgamaya, mrityorma mritangamaya.] But how can one hope to have this prayer granted? For infinite is the distance that lies between truth and untruth, between death and deathlessness. Yet this measureless gulf is bridged in a moment when the self revealing one reveals himself in the soul. There the miracle happens, for there is the meeting−ground of the finite and infinite. *Father, completely sweep away all my sins!* [Footnote: Vishvanideva savitar duratani parasuva.] For in sin man takes part with the finite against the infinite that is in him. It is the defeat of his soul by his self. It is a perilously losing game, in which man stakes his all to gain a part. Sin is the blurring of truth which clouds the purity of our consciousness. In sin we

lust after pleasures, not because they are truly desirable, but because the red light of our passions makes them appear desirable; we long for things not because they are great in themselves, but because our greed exaggerates them and makes them appear great. These exaggerations, these falsifications of the perspective of things, break the harmony of our life at every step; we lose the true standard of values and are distracted by the false claims of the varied interests of life contending with one another. It is this failure to bring all the elements of his nature under the unity and control of the Supreme One that makes man feel the pang of his separation from God and gives rise to the earnest prayer, *O God, O Father, completely sweep away all our sins.* [Footnote: Vishvani deva savitar duritani parasuva.] *Give unto us that which is good* [Footnote: Yad bhadram tanna asuva.], the good which is the daily bread of our souls. In our pleasures we are confined to ourselves, in the good we are freed and we belong to all. As the child in its mother's womb gets its sustenance through the union of its life with the larger life of its mother, so our soul is nourished only through the good which is the recognition of its inner kinship, the channel of its communication with the infinite by which it is surrounded and fed. Hence it is said, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” For righteousness is the divine food of the soul; nothing but this can fill him, can make him live the life of the infinite, can help him in his growth towards the eternal. *We bow to thee from whom come the enjoyments of our life.* [Footnote: Namah sambhavaya.] *We bow also to thee from whom comes the good of our soul.* [Footnote: Namah cankarayacha.] *We bow to thee who art good, the highest good [Footnote: Namah civayacha, civataraya cha.], in whom we are united with everything, that is, in peace and harmony, in goodness and love.*

Man's cry is to reach his fullest expression. It is this desire for self−expression that leads him to seek wealth and power. But he has to discover that accumulation is not realisation. It is the inner light that reveals him, not outer things. When this light is lighted, then in a moment he knows that Man's highest revelation is God's own revelation in him. And his cry is for this—the manifestation of his soul, which is the manifestation of God in his soul. Man becomes perfect man, he attains his fullest expression, when his soul realises itself in the Infinite being who is *Avih* whose very essence is expression.

The real misery of man is in the fact that he has not fully come out, that he is self−obscured, lost in the midst of his own desires. He cannot feel himself beyond his personal surroundings, his greater self is blotted out, his truth is unrealised. The prayer that rises up from his whole being is therefore, *Thou, who art the spirit of manifestation, manifest thyself in me.* [Footnote: Aviravirmayedhi.] This longing for the perfect expression of his self is more deeply inherent in man than his hunger and thirst for bodily sustenance, his lust for wealth and distinction. This prayer is not merely one born individually of him; it is in depth of all things, it is the ceaseless urging in him of the *Avih*, of the spirit of eternal manifestation. The revealment of the infinite in the finite, which is the motive of all creation, is not seen in its perfection in the starry heavens, in the beauty of flowers. It is in the soul of man. For there will seeks its manifestation in will, and freedom turns to win its final prize in the freedom of surrender.

Therefore, it is the self of man which the great King of the universe has not shadowed with his throne—he has left it free. In his physical and mental organism, where man is related with nature, he has to acknowledge the rule of his King, but in his self he is free to disown him. There our God must win his entrance. There he comes as a guest, not as a king, and therefore he has to wait till he is invited. It is the man's self from which God has withdrawn his commands, for there he comes to court our love. His armed force, the laws of nature, stand outside its gate, and only beauty, the messenger of his love, finds admission within its precincts.

It is only in this region of will that anarchy is permitted; only in man's self that the discord of untruth and unrighteousness hold its reign; and things can come to such a pass that we may cry out in our anguish, “Such utter lawlessness could never prevail if there were a God!” Indeed, God has stood aside from our self, where his watchful patience knows no bounds, and where he never forces open the doors if shut against him. For this self of ours has to attain its ultimate meaning, which is the soul, not through the compulsion of God's power but through love, and thus become united with God in freedom.

He whose spirit has been made one with God stands before man as the supreme flower of humanity. There man finds in truth what he is; for there the *Avih* is revealed to him in the soul of man as the most perfect revelation for him of God; for there we see the union of the supreme will with our will, our love with the love everlasting.

Therefore, in our country he who truly loves God receives such homage from men as would be considered almost sacrilegious in the west. We see in him God's wish fulfilled, the most difficult of all obstacles to his revealment removed, and God's own perfect joy fully blossoming in humanity. Through him we find the whole world of man overspread with a divine homeliness. His life, burning with God's love, makes all our earthly love resplendent. All the intimate associations of our life, all its experience of pleasure and pain, group themselves around this display of the divine love, and from the drama that we witness in him. The touch of an infinite mystery passes over the trivial and the familiar, making it break out into ineffable music. The trees and the stars and the blue hills appear to us as symbols aching with a meaning which can never be uttered in words. We seem to watch the Master in the very act of creation of a new world when a man's soul draws her heavy curtain of self aside, when her veil is lifted and she is face to face with her eternal lover.

But what is this state? It is like a morning of spring, varied in its life and beauty, yet one and entire. When a man's life rescued from distractions finds its unity in the soul, then the consciousness of the infinite becomes at once direct and natural to it as the light is to the flame. All the conflicts and contradictions of life are reconciled; knowledge, love and action harmonized; pleasure and pain become one in beauty, enjoyment and renunciation equal in goodness; the breach between the finite and the infinite fills with love and overflows; every moment carries its message of the eternal; the formless appears to us in the form of the flower, of the fruit; the boundless takes us up in his arms as a father and walks by our side as a friend. It is only the soul, the One in man which by its very nature can overcome all limits, and finds its affinity with the Supreme One. While yet we have not attained the internal harmony, and the wholeness of our being, our life remains a life of habits. The world still appears to us as a machine, to be mastered where it is useful, to be guarded against where it is dangerous, and never to be known in its full fellowship with us, alike in its physical nature and in its spiritual life and beauty.

III. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The question why there is evil in existence is the same as why there is imperfection, or, in other words, why there is creation at all. We must take it for granted that it could not be otherwise; that creation must be imperfect, must be gradual, and that it is futile to ask the question, Why we are?

But this is the real question we ought to ask: Is this imperfection the final truth, is evil absolute and ultimate? The river has its boundaries, its banks, but is a river all banks? or are the banks the final facts about the river? Do not these obstructions themselves give its water an onward motion? The towing rope binds a boat, but is the bondage its meaning? Does it not at the same time draw the boat forward?

The current of the world has its boundaries, otherwise it could have no existence, but its purpose is not shown in the boundaries which restrain it, but in its movement, which is towards perfection. The wonder is not that there should be obstacles and sufferings in this world, but that there should be law and order, beauty and joy, goodness and love. The idea of God that man has in his being is the wonder of all wonders. He has felt in the depths of his life that what appears as imperfect is the manifestation of the perfect; just as a man who has an ear for music realises the perfection of a song, while in fact he is only listening to a succession of notes. Man has found out the great paradox that what is limited is not imprisoned within its limits; it is ever moving, and therewith shedding its finitude every moment. In fact, imperfection is not a negation of perfectness; finitude is not contradictory to infinity: they are but completeness manifested in parts, infinity revealed within bounds.

Pain, which is the feeling of our finiteness, is not a fixture in our life. It is not an end in itself, as joy is. To meet with it is to know that it has no part in the true permanence of creation. It is what error is in our intellectual life. To go through the history of the development of science is to go through the maze of mistakes it made current at different times. Yet no one really believes that science is the one perfect mode of disseminating mistakes. The progressive ascertainment of truth is the important thing to remember in the history of science, not its innumerable mistakes. Error, by its nature, cannot be stationary; it cannot remain with truth; like a tramp, it must quit its lodging as soon as it fails to pay its score to the full.

As in intellectual error, so in evil of any other form, its essence is impermanence, for it cannot accord with the whole. Every moment it is being corrected by the totality of things and keeps changing its aspect. We exaggerate its importance by imagining it as a standstill. Could we collect the statistics of the immense amount of death and putrefaction happening every moment in this earth, they would appal us. But evil is ever moving; with all its incalculable immensity it does not effectually clog the current of our life; and we find that the earth, water, and air remain sweet and pure for living beings. All statistics consist of our attempts to represent statistically what is in motion; and in the process things assume a weight in our mind which they have not in reality. For this reason a man, who by his profession is concerned with any particular aspect of life, is apt to magnify its proportions; in laying undue stress upon facts he loses his hold upon truth. A detective may have the opportunity of studying crimes in detail, but he loses his sense of their relative places in the whole social economy. When science collects facts to illustrate the struggle for existence that is going on in the kingdom of life, it raises a picture in our minds of “nature red in tooth and claw.” But in these mental pictures we give a fixity to colours and forms which are really evanescent. It is like calculating the weight of the air on each square inch of our body to prove that it must be crushingly heavy for us. With every weight, however, there is an adjustment, and we lightly bear our burden. With the struggle for existence in nature there is reciprocity. There is the love for children and for comrades; there is the sacrifice of self, which springs from love; and this love is the positive element in life.

If we kept the search−light of our observation turned upon the fact of death, the world would appear to us like a huge charnel− house; but in the world of life the thought of death has, we find, the least possible hold upon our minds. Not because it is the least apparent, but because it is the negative aspect of life; just as, in spite of the fact that we shut our eyelids every second, it is the openings of the eye that count. Life as a whole never takes death seriously. It laughs, dances and plays, it builds, hoards and loves in death's face. Only when we detach one individual fact of death do we see its blankness and become dismayed. We lose sight of the wholeness of a life of which death is part. It is like looking at a piece of cloth through a microscope. It appears like a net; we gaze at the big holes and shiver in imagination. But the truth is, death is not the ultimate reality. It looks black, as the sky looks blue; but it does not blacken existence, just as the sky does not leave its stain upon the wings of the bird.

When we watch a child trying to walk, we see its countless failures; its successes are but few. If we had to limit our observation within a narrow space of time, the sight would be cruel. But we find that in spite of its repeated failures there is an impetus of joy in the child which sustains it in its seemingly impossible task. We see it does not think of its falls so much as of its power to keep its balance though for only a moment.

Like these accidents in a child's attempts to walk, we meet with sufferings in various forms in our life every day, showing the imperfections in our knowledge and our available power, and in the application of our will. But if these revealed our weakness to us only, we should die of utter depression. When we select for observation a limited area of our activities, our individual failures and miseries loom large in our minds; but our life leads us instinctively to take a wider view. It gives us an ideal of perfection which ever carries us beyond our present limitations. Within us we have a hope which always walks in front of our present narrow experience; it is the undying faith in the infinite in us; it will never accept any of our disabilities as a permanent fact; it sets no limit to its own scope; it dares to assert that man has oneness with God; and its wild dreams become true every day.

We see the truth when we set our mind towards the infinite. The ideal of truth is not in the narrow present, not in our immediate sensations, but in the consciousness of the whole which give us a taste of what we *should* have in what we *do* have. Consciously or unconsciously we have in our life this feeling of Truth which is ever larger than its appearance; for our life is facing the infinite, and it is in movement. Its aspiration is therefore infinitely more than its achievement, and as it goes on it finds that no realisation of truth ever leaves it stranded on the desert of finality, but carries it to a region beyond. Evil cannot altogether arrest the course of life on the highway and rob it of its possessions. For the evil has to pass on, it has to grow into good; it cannot stand and give battle to the All. If the least evil could stop anywhere indefinitely, it would sink deep and cut into the very roots of existence. As it is, man does not really believe in evil, just as he cannot believe that violin strings have been purposely made to create the exquisite torture of discordant notes, though by the aid of statistics it can be mathematically proved that the probability of discord is far greater than that of harmony, and for one who can play the violin there are thousands who cannot. The potentiality of perfection outweighs actual contradictions. No doubt there have been people who asserted existence to be an absolute evil, but man can never take them seriously. Their pessimism is a mere pose, either intellectual or sentimental; but life itself is optimistic: it wants to go on. Pessimism is a form of mental dipsomania, it disdains healthy nourishment, indulges in the strong drink of denunciation, and creates an artificial dejection which thirsts for a stronger draught. If existence were an evil, it would wait for no philosopher to prove it. It is like convicting a man of suicide, while all the time he stands before you in the flesh. Existence itself is here to prove that it cannot be an evil.

An imperfection which is not all imperfection, but which has perfection for its ideal, must go through a perpetual realisation. Thus, it is the function of our intellect to realise the truth through untruths, and knowledge is nothing but the continually burning up of error to set free the light of truth. Our will, our character, has to attain perfection by continually overcoming evils, either inside or outside us, or both; our physical life is consuming bodily materials every moment to maintain the life fire; and our moral life too has its fuel to burn. This life process is going on—we know it, we have felt it; and we have a faith which no individual instances to the contrary can shake, that the direction of humanity is from evil to good. For we feel that good is the positive element in man's nature, and in every age and every clime what man values most is his ideals of goodness. We have known the good, we have loved it, and we have paid our highest reverence to men who have shown in their lives what goodness is.

The question will be asked, What is goodness; what does our moral nature mean? My answer is, that when a man begins to have an extended vision of his self, when he realises that he is much more than at present he seems to be, he begins to get conscious of his moral nature. Then he grows aware of that which he is yet to be, and the state not yet experienced by him becomes more real than that under his direct experience. Necessarily, his perspective of life changes, and his will takes the place of his wishes. For will is the supreme wish of the larger life, the life whose greater portion is out of our present reach, most of whose objects are not before our sight. Then comes the conflict of our lesser man with our greater man, of our wishes with our will, of the desire for things affecting our senses with the purpose that is within our heart. Then we begin to distinguish between what we immediately desire and what is good. For good is that which is desirable for our greater self. Thus the sense of goodness comes out of a truer view of our life, which is the connected view of the wholeness of the field of life, and which takes into account not only what is present before us but what is not, and perhaps never humanly can be. Man, who is provident, feels for that life of his which is not yet existent, feels much more that than for the life that is with him; therefore he is ready to sacrifice his present inclination for the unrealised future. In this he becomes great, for he realises truth. Even to be efficiently selfish one has to recognise this truth, and has to curb his immediate impulses—in other words, has to be moral. For our moral faculty is the faculty by which we know that life is not made up of fragments, purposeless and discontinuous. This moral sense of man not only gives him the power to see that the self has a continuity in time, but it also enables him to see that he is not true when he is only restricted to his own self. He is more in truth than he is in fact. He truly belongs to individuals who are not included in his own individuality, and whom he is never even likely to know. As he has a feeling for his future self which is outside his present

consciousness, so he has a feeling for his greater self which is outside the limits of his personality. There is no man who has not this feeling to some extent, who has never sacrificed his selfish desire for the sake of some other person, who has never felt a pleasure in undergoing some loss or trouble because it pleased somebody else. It is a truth that man is not a detached being, that he has a universal aspect; and when he recognises this he becomes great. Even the most evilly−disposed selfishness has to recognise this when it seeks the power to do evil; for it cannot ignore truth and yet be strong. So in order to claim the aid of truth, selfishness has to be unselfish to some extent. A band of robbers must be moral in order to hold together as a band; they may rob the whole world but not each other. To make an immoral intention successful, some of its weapons must be moral. In fact, very often it is our very moral strength which gives us most effectively the power to do evil, to exploit other individuals for our own benefit, to rob other people of their rights. The life of an animal is unmoral, for it is aware only of an immediate present; the life of a man can be immoral, but that only means that it must have a moral basis. What is immoral is imperfectly moral, just as what is false is true to a small extent, or it cannot even be false. Not to see is to be blind, but to see wrongly is to see only in an imperfect manner. Man's selfishness is a beginning to see some connection, some purpose in life; and to act in accordance with its dictates requires self−restraint and regulation of conduct. A selfish man willingly undergoes troubles for the sake of the self, he suffers hardship and privation without a murmur, simply because he knows that what is pain and trouble, looked at from the point of view of a short space of time, are just the opposite when seen in a larger perspective. Thus what is a loss to the smaller man is a gain to the greater, and *vice versa*.

To the man who lives for an idea, for his country, for the good of humanity, life has an extensive meaning, and to that extent pain becomes less important to him. To live the life of goodness is to live the life of all. Pleasure is for one's own self, but goodness is concerned with the happiness of all humanity and for all time. From the point of view of the good, pleasure and pain appear in a different meaning; so much so, that pleasure may be shunned, and pain be courted in its place, and death itself be made welcome as giving a higher value to life. From these higher standpoints of a man's life, the standpoints of the good, pleasure and pain lose their absolute value. Martyrs prove it in history, and we prove it every day in our life in our little martyrdoms. When we take a pitcherful of water from the sea it has its weight, but when we take a dip into the sea itself a thousand pitchersful of water flow above our head, and we do not feel their weight. We have to carry the pitcher of self with our strength; and so, while on the plane of selfishness pleasure and pain have their full weight, on the moral plane they are so much lightened that the man who has reached it appears to us almost superhuman in his patience under crushing trails, and his forbearance in the face of malignant persecution.

To live in perfect goodness is to realise one's life in the infinitive. This is the most comprehensive view of life which we can have by our inherent power of the moral vision of the wholeness of life. And the teaching of Buddha is to cultivate this moral power to the highest extent, to know that our field of activities is not bound to the plane of our narrow self. This is the vision of the heavenly kingdom of Christ. When we attain to that universal life, which is the moral life, we become freed from the bonds of pleasure and pain, and the place vacated by our self becomes filled with an unspeakable joy which springs from measureless love. In this state the soul's activity is all the more heightened, only its motive power is not from desires, but in its own joy. This is the *Karma−yoga* of the *Gita*, the way to become one with the infinite activity by the exercise of the activity of disinterested goodness.

When Buddha mentioned upon the way of realising mankind from the grip of misery he came to this truth: that when man attains his highest end by merging the individual in the universal, he becomes free from the thraldom of pain. Let us consider this point more fully.

A student of mine once related to me his adventure in a storm, and complained that all the time he was troubled with the feeling that this great commotion in nature behaved to him as if he were no more than a mere handful of dust. That he was a distinct personality with a will of his own had not the least influence upon what was happening.

I said, “If consideration for our individuality could sway nature from her path, then it would be the individuals who would suffer most.”

But he persisted in his doubt, saying that there was this fact which could not be ignored—the feeling that I am. The “I” in us seeks for a relation which is individual to it.

I replied that the relation of the “I” is with something which is “not−I.” So we must have a medium which is common to both, and we must be absolutely certain that it is the same to the “I” as it is to the “not−I.”

This is what needs repeating here. We have to keep in mind that our individuality by its nature is impelled to seek for the universal. Our body can only die if it tries to eat its own substance, and our eye loses the meaning of its function if it can only see itself.

Just as we find that the stronger the imagination the less is it merely imaginary and the more is it in harmony with truth, so we see the more vigorous our individuality the more does it widen towards the universal. For the greatness of a personality is not in itself but in its content, which is universal, just as the depth of a lake is judged not by the size of its cavity but by the depth of its water.

So, if it is a truth that the yearning of our nature is for reality, and that our personality cannot be happy with a fantastic universe of its own creation, then it is clearly best for it that our will can only deal with things by following their law, and cannot do with them just as it pleases. This unyielding sureness of reality sometimes crosses our will, and very often leads us to disaster, just as the firmness of the earth invariably hurts the falling child who is learning to walk. Nevertheless it is the same firmness that hurts him which makes his walking possible. Once, while passing under a bridge, the mast of my boat got stuck in one of its girders. If only for a moment the mast would have bent an inch or two, or the bridge raised its back like a yawning cat, or the river given in, it would have been all right with me. But they took no notice of my helplessness. That is the very reason why I could make use of the river, and sail upon it with the help of the mast, and that is why, when its current was inconvenient, I could rely upon the bridge. Things are what they are, and we have to know them if we would deal with them, and knowledge of them is possible because our wish is not their law. This knowledge is a joy to us, for the knowledge is one of the channels of our relation with the things outside us; it is making them our own, and thus widening the limit of our self.

At every step we have to take into account others than ourselves. For only in death are we alone. A poet is a true poet when he can make his personal idea joyful to all men, which he could not do if he had not a medium common to all his audience. This common language has its own law which the poet must discover and follow, by doing which he becomes true and attains poetical immortality.

We see then that man's individuality is not his highest truth; there is that in him which is universal. If he were made to live in a world where his own self was the only factor to consider, then that would be the worst prison imaginable to him, for man's deepest joy is in growing greater and greater by more and more union with the all. This, as we have seen, would be an impossibility if there were no law common to all. Only by discovering the law and following it, do we become great, do we realise the universal; while, so long as our individual desires are at conflict with the universal law, we suffer pain and are futile.

There was a time when we prayed for special concessions, we expected that the laws of nature should be held in abeyance for our own convenience. But now we know better. We know that law cannot be set aside, and in this knowledge we have become strong. For this law is not something apart from us; it is our own. The universal power which is manifested in the universal law is one with our own power. It will thwart us where we are small, where we are against the current of things; but it will help us where we are great, where we are in unison with the all. Thus, through the help of science, as we come to know more of the laws of nature, we gain in power; we tend to attain a universal body. Our organ of sight, our organ of locomotion, our physical

strength becomes world−wide; steam and electricity become our nerve and muscle. Thus we find that, just as throughout our bodily organisation there is a principle of relation by virtue of which we can call the entire body our own, and can use it as such, so all through the universe there is that principle of uninterrupted relation by virtue of which we can call the whole world our extended body and use it accordingly. And in this age of science it is our endeavour fully to establish our claim to our world−self. We know all our poverty and sufferings are owing to our inability to realise this legitimate claim of ours. Really, there is no limit to our powers, for we are not outside the universal power which is the expression of universal law. We are on our way to overcome disease and death, to conquer pain and poverty; for through scientific knowledge we are ever on our way to realise the universal in its physical aspect. And as we make progress we find that pain, disease, and poverty of power are not absolute, but that is only the want of adjustment of our individual self to our universal self which gives rise to them.

It is the same with our spiritual life. When the individual man in us chafes against the lawful rule of the universal man we become morally small, and we must suffer. In such a condition our successes are our greatest failures, and the very fulfilment of our desires leaves us poorer. We hanker after special gains for ourselves, we want to enjoy privileges which none else can share with us. But everything that is absolutely special must keep up a perpetual warfare with what is general. In such a state of civil war man always lives behind barricades, and in any civilisation which is selfish our homes are not real homes, but artificial barriers around us. Yet we complain that we are not happy, as if there were something inherent in the nature of things to make us miserable. The universal spirit is waiting to crown us with happiness, but our individual spirit would not accept it. It is our life of the self that causes conflicts and complications everywhere, upsets the normal balance of society and gives rise to miseries of all kinds. It brings things to such a pass that to maintain order we have to create artificial coercions and organised forms of tyranny, and tolerate infernal institutions in our midst, whereby at every moment humanity is humiliated.

We have seen that in order to be powerful we have to submit to the laws of the universal forces, and to realise in practice that they are our own. So, in order to be happy, we have to submit our individual will to the sovereignty of the universal will, and to feel in truth that it is our own will. When we reach that state wherein the adjustment of the finite in us to the infinite is made perfect, then pain itself becomes a valuable asset. It becomes a measuring rod with which to gauge the true value of our joy.

The most important lesson that man can learn from his life is not that there *is* pain in this world, but that it depends upon him to turn it into good account, that it is possible for him to transmute it into joy. The lesson has not been lost altogether to us, and there is no man living who would willingly be deprived of his right to suffer pain, for that is his right to be a man. One day the wife of a poor labourer complained bitterly to me that her eldest boy was going to be sent away to a rich relative's house for part of the year. It was the implied kind intention of trying to relieve her of her trouble that gave her the shock, for a mother's trouble is a mother's own by her inalienable right of love, and she was not going to surrender it to any dictates of expediency. Man's freedom is never in being saved troubles, but it is the freedom to take trouble for his own good, to make the trouble an element in his joy. It can be made so only when we realise that our individual self is not the highest meaning of our being, that in us we have the world−man who is immortal, who is not afraid of death or sufferings, and who looks upon pain as only the other side of joy. He who has realised this knows that it is pain which is our true wealth as imperfect beings, and has made us great and worthy to take our seat with the perfect. He knows that we are not beggars; that it is the hard coin which must be paid for everything valuable in this life, for our power, our wisdom, our love; that in pain is symbolised the infinite possibility of perfection, the eternal unfolding of joy; and the man who loses all pleasure in accepting pain sinks down and down to the lowest depth of penury and degradation. It is only when we invoke the aid of pain for our self−gratification that she becomes evil and takes her vengeance for the insult done to her by hurling us into misery. For she is the vestal virgin consecrated to the service of the immortal perfection, and when she takes her true place before the altar of the infinite she casts off her dark veil and bares her face to the beholder as a revelation of supreme joy.

IV. THE PROBLEM OF SELF

At one pole of my being I am one with stocks and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies, deep down below. Its strength lies in its being held firm in the clasp of comprehensive world, and in the fullness of its community with all things.

But at the other pole of my being I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable. The whole weight of the universe cannot crush out this individuality of mine. I maintain it in spite of the tremendous gravitation of all things. It is small in appearance but great in reality. For it holds its own against the forces that would rob it of its distinction and make it one with the dust.

This is the superstructure of the self which rises from the indeterminate depth and darkness of its foundation into the open, proud of its isolation, proud of having given shape to a single individual idea of the architect's which has no duplicate in the whole universe. If this individuality be demolished, then though no material be lost, not an atom destroyed, the creative joy which was crystallised therein is gone. We are absolutely bankrupt if we are deprived of this specialty, this individuality, which is the only thing we can call our own; and which, if lost, is also a loss to the whole world. It is most valuable because it is not universal. And therefore only through it can we gain the universe more truly than if we were lying within its breast unconscious of our distinctiveness. The universal is ever seeking its consummation in the unique. And the desire we have to keep our uniqueness intact is really the desire of the universe acting in us. It is our joy of the infinite in us that gives us our joy in ourselves.

That this separateness of self is considered by man as his most precious possession is proved by the sufferings he undergoes and the sins he commits for its sake. But the consciousness of separation has come from the eating of the fruit of knowledge. It has led man to shame and crime and death; yet it is dearer to him than any paradise where the self lies, securely slumbering in perfect innocence in the womb of mother nature.

It is a constant striving and suffering for us to maintain the separateness of this self of ours. And in fact it is this suffering which measures its value. One side of the value is sacrifice, which represents how much the cost has been. The other side of it is the attainment, which represents how much has been gained. If the self meant nothing to us but pain and sacrifice, it could have no value for us, and on no account would we willingly undergo such sacrifice. In such case there could be no doubt at all that the highest object of humanity would be the annihilation of self.

But if there is a corresponding gain, if it does not end in a void but in a fullness, then it is clear that its negative qualities, its very sufferings and sacrifices, make it all the more precious. That it is so has been proved by those who have realised the positive significance of self, and have accepted its responsibilities with eagerness and undergone sacrifices without flinching.

With the foregoing introduction it will be easy for me to answer the question once asked by one of my audience as to whether the annihilation of self has not been held by India as the supreme goal of humanity?

In the first place we must keep in mind the fact that man is never literal in the expression of his ideas, except in matters most trivial. Very often man's words are not a language at all, but merely a vocal gesture of the dumb. They may indicate, but do not express his thoughts. The more vital his thoughts the more have his words to be explained by the context of his life. Those who seek to know his meaning by the aid of the dictionary only technically reach the house, for they are stopped by the outside wall and find no entrance to the hall. This is the reason why the teachings of our greatest prophets give rise to endless disputations when we try to understand them by following their words and not be realising them in our own lives. The men who

are cursed with the gift of the literal mind are the unfortunate ones who are always busy with their nets and neglect the fishing.

It is not only in Buddhism and the Indian religions, but in Christianity too, that the ideal of selflessness is preached with all fervour. In the last the symbol of death has been used for expressing the idea of man's deliverance from the life which is not true. This is the same as Nirvnana, the symbol of the extinction of the lamp.

In the typical thought of India it is held that the true deliverance of man is the deliverance from *avidya*, from ignorance. It is not in destroying anything that is positive and real, for that cannot be possible, but that which is negative, which obstructs our vision of truth. When this obstruction, which is ignorance, is removed, then only is the eyelid drawn up which is no loss to the eye.

It is our ignorance which makes us think that our self, as self, is real, that it has its complete meaning in itself. When we take that wrong view of self then we try to live in such a manner as to make self the ultimate object of our life. Then we are doomed to disappointment like the man who tries to reach his destination by firmly clutching the dust of the road. Our self has no means of holding us, for its own nature is to pass on; and by clinging to this thread of self which is passing through the loom of life we cannot make it serve the purpose of the cloth into which it is being woven. When a man, with elaborate care, arranges for an enjoyment of the self, he lights a fire but has no dough to make his bread with; the fire flares up and consumes itself to extinction, like an unnatural beast that eats its own progeny and dies.

In an unknown language the words are tyrannically prominent. They stop us but say nothing. To be rescued from this fetter of words we must rid ourselves of the *avidya*, our ignorance, and then our mind will find its freedom in the inner idea. But it would be foolish to say that our ignorance of the language can be dispelled only by the destruction of the words. No, when the perfect knowledge comes, every word remains in its place, only they do not bind us to themselves, but let us pass through them and lead us to the idea which is emancipation.

Thus it is only *avidya* which makes the self our fetter by making us think that it is an end in itself, and by preventing our seeing that it contains the idea that transcends its limits. That is why the wise man comes and says, “Set yourselves free from the *avidya*; know your true soul and be saved from the grasp of the self which imprisons you.”

We gain our freedom when we attain our truest nature. The man who is an artist finds his artistic freedom when he finds his ideal of art. Then is he freed from laborious attempts at imitation, from the goadings of popular approbation. It is the function of religion not to destroy our nature but to fulfil it.

The Sanskrit word *dharma* which is usually translated into English as religion has a deeper meaning in our language. *Dharma* is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth, of all things. *Dharma* is the ultimate purpose that is working in our self. When any wrong is done we say that *dharma* is violated, meaning that the lie has been given to our true nature.

But this *dharma*, which is the truth in us, is not apparent, because it is inherent. So much so, that it has been held that sinfulness is the nature of man, and only by the special grace of God can a particular person be saved. This is like saying that the nature of the seed is to remain enfolded within its shell, and it is only by some special miracle that it can be grown into a tree. But do we not know that the *appearance* of the seed contradicts its true nature? When you submit it to chemical analysis you may find in it carbon and proteid and a good many other things, but not the idea of a branching tree. Only when the tree begins to take shape do you come to see its *dharma*, and then you can affirm without doubt that the seed which has been wasted and allowed to rot in the ground has been thwarted in its *dharma*, in the fulfilment of its true nature. In the history

of humanity we have known the living seed in us to sprout. We have seen the great purpose in us taking shape in the lives of our greatest men, and have felt certain that though there are numerous individual lives that seem ineffectual, still it is not their *dharma* to remain barren; but it is for them to burst their cover and transform themselves into a vigorous spiritual shoot, growing up into the air and light, and branching out in all directions.

The freedom of the seed is in the attainment of its *dharma*, its nature and destiny of becoming a tree; it is the non−accomplishment which is its prison. The sacrifice by which a thing attains its fulfilment is not a sacrifice which ends in death; it is the casting−off of bonds which wins freedom.

When we know the highest ideal of freedom which a man has, we know his *dharma*, the essence of his nature, the real meaning of his self. At first sight it seems that man counts that as freedom by which he gets unbounded opportunities of self gratification and self−aggrandisement. But surely this is not borne out by history. Our revelatory men have always been those who have lived the life of self−sacrifice. The higher nature in man always seeks for something which transcends itself and yet is its deepest truth; which claims all its sacrifice, yet makes this sacrifice its own recompense. This is man's *dharma*, man's religion, and man's self is the vessel which is to carry this sacrifice to the altar.

We can look at our self in its two different aspects. The self which displays itself, and the self which transcends itself and thereby reveals its own meaning. To display itself it tries to be big, to stand upon the pedestal of its accumulations, and to retain everything to itself. To reveal itself it gives up everything it has; thus becoming perfect like a flower that has blossomed out from the bud, pouring from its chalice of beauty all its sweetness.

The lamp contains its oil, which it holds securely in its close grasp and guards from the least loss. Thus is it separate from all other objects around it and is miserly. But when lighted it finds its meaning at once; its relation with all things far and near is established, and it freely sacrifices its fund of oil to feed the flame.

Such a lamp is our self. So long as it hoards its possessions it keeps itself dark, its conduct contradicts its true purpose. When it finds illumination it forgets itself in a moment, holds the light high, and serves it with everything it has; for therein is its revelation. This revelation is the freedom which Buddha preached. He asked the lamp to give up its oil. But purposeless giving up is a still darker poverty which he never could have meant. The lamp must give up its oil to the light and thus set free the purpose it has in its hoarding. This is emancipation. The path Buddha pointed out was not merely the practice of self− abnegation, but the widening of love. And therein lies the true meaning of Buddha's preaching.

When we find that the state of *Nirvana* preached by Buddha is through love, then we know for certain that *Nirvana* is the highest culmination of love. For love is an end unto itself. Everything else raises the question “Why?” in our mind, and we require a reason for it. But when we say, “I love,” then there is no room for the “why”; it is the final answer in itself.

Doubtless, even selfishness impels one to give away. But the selfish man does it on compulsion. That is like plucking fruit when it is unripe; you have to tear it from the tree and bruise the branch. But when a man loves, giving becomes a matter of joy to him, like the tree's surrender of the ripe fruit. All our belongings assume a weight by the ceaseless gravitation of our selfish desires; we cannot easily cast them away from us. They seem to belong to our very nature, to stick to us as a second skin, and we bleed as we detach them. But when we are possessed by love, its force acts in the opposite direction. The things that closely adhered to us lose their adhesion and weight, and we find that they are not of us. Far from being a loss to give them away, we find in that the fulfilment of our being.

Thus we find in perfect love the freedom of our self. That only which is done for love is done freely, however much pain it may cause. Therefore working for love is freedom in action. This is the meaning of the teaching of disinterested work in the *Gita*.

The *Gita* says action we must have, for only in action do we manifest our nature. But this manifestation is not perfect so long as our action is not free. In fact, our nature is obscured by work done by the compulsion of want or fear. The mother reveals herself in the service of her children, so our true freedom is not the freedom *from* action but freedom *in* action, which can only be attained in the work of love.

God's manifestation is in his work of creation and it is said in the Upanishad, *Knowledge, power, and action are of his nature* [Footnote: “Svabhaviki jnana bala kriyacha.”]; they are not imposed upon him from outside. Therefore his work is his freedom, and in his creation he realises himself. The same thing is said elsewhere in other words: *From joy does spring all this creation, by joy is it maintained, towards joy does it progress, and into joy does it enter*. [Footnote: Anandadhyeva khalvimani bhutani jayante, anandena jatani jivanti, anandamprayantyabhisamvicanti.] It means that God's creation has not its source in any necessity; it comes from his fullness of joy; it is his love that creates, therefore in creation is his own revealment.

The artist who has a joy in the fullness of his artistic idea objectifies it and thus gains it more fully by holding it afar. It is joy which detaches ourselves from us, and then gives it form in creations of love in order to make it more perfectly our own. Hence there must be this separation, not a separation of repulsion but a separation of love. Repulsion has only the one element, the element of severance. But love has two, the element of severance, which is only an appearance, and the element of union which is the ultimate truth. Just as when the father tosses his child up from his arms it has the appearance of rejection but its truth is quite the reverse.

So we must know that the meaning of our self is not to be found in its separateness from God and others, but in the ceaseless realisation of *yoga*, of union; not on the side of the canvas where it is blank, but on the side where the picture is being painted.

This is the reason why the separateness of our self has been described by our philosophers as *maya*, as an illusion, because it has no intrinsic reality of its own. It looks perilous; it raises its isolation to a giddy height and casts a black shadow upon the fair face of existence; from the outside it has an aspect of a sudden disruption, rebellious and destructive; it is proud, domineering and wayward; it is ready to rob the world of all its wealth to gratify its craving of a moment; to pluck with a reckless, cruel hand all the plumes from the divine bird of beauty to deck its ugliness for a day; indeed man's legend has it that it bears the black mark of disobedience stamped on its forehead for ever; but still all this *maya*, envelopment of *avidya*; it is the mist, it is not the sun; it is the black smoke that presages the fire of love.

Imagine some savage who, in his ignorance, thinks that it is the paper of the banknote that has the magic, by virtue of which the possessor of it gets all he wants. He piles up the papers, hides them, handles them in all sorts of absurd ways, and then at last, wearied by his efforts, comes to the sad conclusion that they are absolutely worthless, only fit to be thrown into the fire. But the wise man knows that the paper of the banknote is all *maya*, and until it is given up to the bank it is futile. It is only *avidya*, our ignorance, that makes us believe that the separateness of our self like the paper of the banknote is precious in itself, and by acting on this belief our self is rendered valueless. It is only when the *avidya* is removed that this very self comes to us with a wealth which is priceless. For *He manifests Himself in forms which His joy assumes*. [Footnote: Anandarupamamritam yadvibhati.] These forms are separate from Him, and the value that these forms have is only what his joy has imparted to them. When we transfer back these forms into that original joy, which is love, then we cash them in the bank and we find their truth.

When pure necessity drives man to his work it takes an accidental and contingent character, it becomes a mere makeshift arrangement; it is deserted and left in ruins when necessity changes its course. But when his work is

the outcome of joy, the forms that it takes have the elements of immortality. The immortal in man imparts to it its own quality of permanence.

Our self, as a form of God's joy, is deathless. For his joy is *amritham*, eternal. This it is in us which makes us sceptical of death, even when the fact of death cannot be doubted. In reconcilement of this contradiction in us we come to the truth that in the dualism of death and life there is a harmony. We know that the life of a soul, which is finite in its expression and infinite in its principle, must go through the portals of death in its journey to realise the infinite. It is death which is monistic, it has no life in it. But life is dualistic; it has an appearance as well as truth; and death is that appearance, that *maya*, which is an inseparable companion to life. Our self to live must go through a continual change and growth of form, which may be termed a continual death and a continual life going on at the same time. It is really courting death when we refuse to accept death; when we wish to give the form of the self some fixed changelessness; when the self feels no impulse which urges it to grow out of itself; when it treats its limits as final and acts accordingly. Then comes our teacher's call to die to this death; not a call to annihilation but to eternal life. It is the extinction of the lamp in the morning light; not the abolition of the sun. It is really asking us consciously to give effect to the innermost wish that we have in the depths of our nature.

We have a dual set of desires in our being, which it should be our endeavour to bring into a harmony. In the region of our physical nature we have one set of which we are conscious always. We wish to enjoy our food and drink, we hanker after bodily pleasure and comfort. These desires are self−centered; they are solely concerned with their respective impulses. The wishes of our palate often run counter to what our stomach can allow.

But we have another set, which is the desire of our physical system as a whole, of which we are usually unconscious. It is the wish for health. This is always doing its work, mending and repairing, making new adjustments in cases of accident, and skilfully restoring the balance wherever disturbed. It has no concern with the fulfilment of our immediate bodily desires, but it goes beyond the present time. It is the principle of our physical wholeness, it links our life with its past and its future and maintains the unity of its parts. He who is wise knows it, and makes his other physical wishes harmonise with it.

We have a greater body which is the social body. Society is an organism, of which we as parts have our individual wishes. We want our own pleasure and license. We want to pay less and gain more than anybody else. This causes scramblings and fights. But there is that other wish in us which does its work in the depths of the social being. It is the wish for the welfare of the society. It transcends the limits of the present and the personal. It is on the side of the infinite.

He who is wise tries to harmonise the wishes that seek for self−gratification with the wish for the social good, and only thus can he realise his higher self.

In its finite aspect the self is conscious of its separateness, and there it is ruthless in its attempt to have more distinction than all others. But in its infinite aspect its wish is to gain that harmony which leads to its perfection and not its mere aggrandisement.

The emancipation of our physical nature is in attaining health, of our social being in attaining goodness, and of our self in attaining love. This last is what Buddha describes as extinction—the extinction of selfishness—which is the function of love, and which does not lead to darkness but to illumination. This is the attainment of *bodhi*, or the true awakening; it is the revealing in us of the infinite joy by the light of love.

The passage of our self is through its selfhood, which is independent, to its attainment of soul, which is harmonious. This harmony can never be reached through compulsion. So our will, in the history of its growth, must come through independence and rebellion to the ultimate completion. We must have the possibility of

the negative form of freedom, which is licence, before we can attain the positive freedom, which is love.

This negative freedom, the freedom of self−will, can turn its back upon its highest realisation, but it cannot cut itself away from it altogether, for then it will lose its own meaning. Our self−will has freedom up to a certain extent; it can know what it is to break away from the path, but it cannot continue in that direction indefinitely. For we are finite on our negative side. We must come to an end in our evil doing, in our career of discord. For evil is not infinite, and discord cannot be an end in itself. Our will has freedom in order that it may find out that its true course is towards goodness and love. For goodness and love are infinite, and only in the infinite is the perfect realisation of freedom possible. So our will can be free not towards the limitations of our self, not where it is *maya* and negation, but towards the unlimited, where is truth and love. Our freedom cannot go against its own principle of freedom and yet be free; it cannot commit suicide and yet live. We cannot say that we should have infinite freedom to fetter ourselves, for the fettering ends the freedom.

So in the freedom of our will, we have the same dualism of appearance and truth—our self−will is only the appearance of freedom and love is the truth. When we try to make this appearance independent of truth, then our attempt brings misery and proves its own futility in the end. Everything has this dualism of *maya* and *satyam*, appearance and truth. Words are *maya* where they are merely sounds and finite, they are *satyam* where they are ideas and infinite. Our self is *maya* where it is merely individual and finite, where it considers its separateness as absolute; it is *satyam* where it recognises its essence in the universal and infinite, in the supreme self, in *paramatman*. This is what Christ means when he says, "Before Abraham was I am." This is the eternal *I am* that speaks through the *I am* that is in me. The individual *I am* attains its perfect end when it realises its freedom of harmony in the infinite *I am*. Then is it *mukti*, its deliverance from the thraldom of *maya*, of appearance, which springs from *avidya*, from ignorance; its emancipation in *cantam civam advaitam*, in the perfect repose in truth, in the perfect activity in goodness, and in the perfect union in love.

Not only in our self but also in nature is there this separateness from God, which has been described as *maya* by our philosophers, because the separateness does not exist by itself, it does not limit God's infinity from outside. It is his own will that has imposed limits to itself, just as the chess−player restricts his will with regard to the moving of the chessmen. The player willingly enters into definite relations with each particular piece and realises the joy of his power by these very restrictions. It is not that he cannot move the chessmen just as he pleases, but if he does so then there can be no play. If God assumes his role of omnipotence, then his creation is at an end and his power loses all its meaning. For power to be a power must act within limits. God's water must be water, his earth can never be other than earth. The law that has made them water and earth is his own law by which he has separated the play from the player, for therein the joy of the player consists.

As by the limits of law nature is separated from God, so it is the limits of its egoism which separates the self from him. He has willingly set limits to his will, and has given us mastery over the little world of our own. It is like a father's settling upon his son some allowance within the limit of which he is free to do what he likes. Though it remains a portion of the father's own property, yet he frees it from the operation of his own will. The reason of it is that the will, which is love's will and therefore free, can have its joy only in a union with another free will. The tyrant who must have slaves looks upon them as instruments of his purpose. It is the consciousness of his own necessity which makes him crush the will out of them, to make his self−interest absolutely secure. This self−interest cannot brook the least freedom in others, because it is not itself free. The tyrant is really dependent on his slaves, and therefore he tries to make them completely useful by making them subservient to his own will. But a lover must have two wills for the realisation of his love, because the consummation of love is in harmony, the harmony between freedom and freedom. So God's love from which our self has taken form has made it separate from God; and it is God's love which again establishes a reconciliation and unites God with our self through the separation. That is why our self has to go through endless renewals. For in its career of separateness it cannot go on for ever. Separateness is the finitude where it finds its barriers to come back again and again to its infinite source. Our self has ceaselessly to cast off its

age, repeatedly shed its limits in oblivion and death, in order to realise its immortal youth. Its personality must merge in the universal time after time, in fact pass through it every moment, ever to refresh its individual life. It must follow the eternal rhythm and touch the fundamental unity at every step, and thus maintain its separation balanced in beauty and strength.

The play of life and death we see everywhere—this transmutation of the old into the new. The day comes to us every morning, naked and white, fresh as a flower. But we know it is old. It is age itself. It is that very ancient day which took up the newborn earth in its arms, covered it with its white mantle of light, and sent it forth on its pilgrimage among the stars.

Yet its feet are untired and its eyes undimmed. It carries the golden amulet of ageless eternity, at whose touch all wrinkles vanish from the forehead of creation. In the very core of the world's heart stands immortal youth. Death and decay cast over its face momentary shadows and pass on; they leave no marks of their steps—and truth remains fresh and young.

This old, old day of our earth is born again and again every morning. It comes back to the original refrain of its music. If its march were the march of an infinite straight line, if it had not the awful pause of its plunge in the abysmal darkness and its repeated rebirth in the life of the endless beginning, then it would gradually soil and bury truth with its dust and spread ceaseless aching over the earth under its heavy tread. Then every moment would leave its load of weariness behind, and decrepitude would reign supreme on its throne of eternal dirt.

But every morning the day is reborn among the newly−blossomed flowers with the same message retold and the same assurance renewed that death eternally dies, that the waves of turmoil are on the surface, and that the sea of tranquillity is fathomless. The curtain of night is drawn aside and truth emerges without a speck of dust on its garment, without a furrow of age on its lineaments.

We see that he who is before everything else is the same to−day. Every note of the song of creation comes fresh from his voice. The universe is not a mere echo, reverberating from sky to sky, like a homeless wanderer—the echo of an old song sung once for all in the dim beginning of things and then left orphaned. Every moment it comes from the heart of the master, it is breathed in his breath.

And that is the reason why it overspreads the sky like a thought taking shape in a poem, and never has to break into pieces with the burden of its own accumulating weight. Hence the surprise of endless variations, the advent of the unaccountable, the ceaseless procession of individuals, each of whom is without a parallel in creation. As at the first so to the last, the beginning never ends—the world is ever old and ever new.

It is for our self to know that it must be born anew every moment of its life. It must break through all illusions that encase it in their crust to make it appear old, burdening it with death.

For life is immortal youthfulness, and it hates age that tries to clog its movements—age that belongs not to life in truth, but follows it as the shadow follows the lamp.

Our life, like a river, strikes its banks not to find itself closed in by them, but to realise anew every moment that it has its unending opening towards the sea. It is a poem that strikes its metre at every step not to be silenced by its rigid regulations, but to give expression every moment to the inner freedom of its harmony.

The boundary walls of our individuality thrust us back within our limits, on the one hand, and thus lead us, on the other, to the unlimited. Only when we try to make these limits infinite are we launched into an impossible contradiction and court miserable failure.

This is the cause which leads to the great revolutions in human history. Whenever the part, spurning the whole, tries to run a separate course of its own, the great pull of the all gives it a violent wrench, stops it suddenly, and brings it to the dust. Whenever the individual tries to dam the ever−flowing current of the world−force and imprison it within the area of his particular use, it brings on disaster. However powerful a king may be, he cannot raise his standard or rebellion against the infinite source of strength, which is unity, and yet remain powerful.

It has been said, *By unrighteousness men prosper, gain what they desire, and triumph over their enemies, but at the end they are cut off at the root and suffer extinction.* [Footnote: Adharmenaidhate tavat tato bahdrani pacyati tatah sapatnan jayati samulastu vinacyati.] Our roots must go deep down into the universal if we would attain the greatness of personality.

It is the end of our self to seek that union. It must bend its head low in love and meekness and take its stand where great and small all meet. It has to gain by its loss and rise by its surrender. His games would be a horror to the child if he could not come back to his mother, and our pride of personality will be a curse to us if we cannot give it up in love. We must know that it is only the revelation of the Infinite which is endlessly new and eternally beautiful in us, and which gives the only meaning to our self.

V. REALISATION IN LOVE

We come now to the eternal problem of co−existence of the infinite and the finite, of the supreme being and our soul. There is a sublime paradox that lies at the root of existence. We never can go round it, because we never can stand outside the problem and weigh it against any other possible alternative. But the problem exists in logic only; in reality it does not offer us any difficulty at all. Logically speaking, the distance between two points, however near, may be said to be infinite because it is infinitely divisible. But we *do* cross the infinite at every step, and meet the eternal in every second. Therefore some of our philosophers say there is no such thing as finitude; it is but a *maya*, an illusion. The real is the infinite, and it is only *maya*, the unreality, which causes the appearance of the finite. But the word *maya* is a mere name, it is no explanation. It is merely saying that with truth there is this appearance which is the opposite of truth; but how they come to exist at one and the same time is incomprehensible.

We have what we call in Sanskrit *dvandva*, a series of opposites in creation; such as, the positive pole and the negative, the centripetal force and the centrifugal, attraction and repulsion. These are also mere names, they are no explanations. They are only different ways of asserting that the world in its essence is a reconciliation of pairs of opposing forces. These forces, like the left and the right hands of the creator, are acting in absolute harmony, yet acting from opposite directions.

There is a bond of harmony between our two eyes, which makes them act in unison. Likewise there is an unbreakable continuity of relation in the physical world between heat and cold, light and darkness, motion and rest, as between the bass and treble notes of a piano. That is why these opposites do not bring confusion in the universe, but harmony. If creation were but a chaos, we should have to imagine the two opposing principles as trying to get the better of each other. But the universe is not under martial law, arbitrary and provisional. Here we find no force which can run amok, or go on indefinitely in its wild road, like an exiled outlaw, breaking all harmony with its surroundings; each force, on the contrary, has to come back in a curved line to its equilibrium. Waves rise, each to its individual height in a seeming attitude of unrelenting competition, but only up to a certain point; and thus we know of the great repose of the sea to which they are all related, and to which they must all return in a rhythm which is marvellously beautiful.

In fact, these undulations and vibrations, these risings and fallings, are not due to the erratic contortions of disparate bodies, they are a rhythmic dance. Rhythm never can be born of the haphazard struggle of combat.

Its underlying principle must be unity, not opposition.

This principle of unity is the mystery of all mysteries. The existence of a duality at once raises a question in our minds, and we seek its solution in the One. When at last we find a relation between these two, and thereby see them as one in essence, we feel that we have come to the truth. And then we give utterance to this most startling of all paradoxes, that the One appears as many, that the appearance is the opposite of truth and yet is inseparably related to it.

Curiously enough, there are men who lose that feeling of mystery, which is at the root of all our delights, when they discover the uniformity of law among the diversity of nature. As if gravitation is not more of a mystery than the fall of an apple, as if the evolution from one scale of being to the other is not something which is even more shy of explanation than a succession of creations. The trouble is that we very often stop at such a law as if it were the final end of our search, and then we find that it does not even begin to emancipate our spirit. It only gives satisfaction to our intellect, and as it does not appeal to our whole being it only deadens in us the sense of the infinite.

A great poem, when analysed, is a set of detached sounds. The reader who finds out the meaning, which is the inner medium that connects these outer sounds, discovers a perfect law all through, which is never violated in the least; the law of the evolution of ideas, the law of the music and the form.

But law in itself is a limit. It only shows that whatever is can never be otherwise. When a man is exclusively occupied with the search for the links of causality, his mind succumbs to the tyranny of law in escaping from the tyranny of facts. In learning a language, when from mere words we reach the laws of words we have gained a great deal. But if we stop at that point, and only concern ourselves with the marvels of the formation of a language, seeking the hidden reason of all its apparent caprices, we do not reach the end—for grammar is not literature, prosody is not a poem.

When we come to literature we find that though it conforms to rules of grammar it is yet a thing of joy, it is freedom itself. The beauty of a poem is bound by strict laws, yet it transcends them. The laws are its wings, they do not keep it weighed down, they carry it to freedom. Its form is in law but its spirit is in beauty. Law is the first step towards freedom, and beauty is the complete liberation which stands on the pedestal of law. Beauty harmonises in itself the limit and the beyond, the law and the liberty.

In the world−poem, the discovery of the law of its rhythms, the measurement of its expansion and contraction, movement and pause, the pursuit of its evolution of forms and characters, are true achievements of the mind; but we cannot stop there. It is like a railway station; but the station platform is not our home. Only he has attained the final truth who knows that the whole world is a creation of joy.

This leads me to think how mysterious the relation of the human heart with nature must be. In the outer world of activity nature has one aspect, but in our hearts, in the inner world, it presents an altogether different picture.

Take an instance—the flower of a plant. However fine and dainty it may look, it is pressed to do a great service, and its colours and forms are all suited to its work. It must bring forth the fruit, or the continuity of plant life will be broken and the earth will be turned into a desert ere long. The colour and the smell of the flower are all for some purpose therefore; no sooner is it fertilised by the bee, and the time of its fruition arrives, than it sheds its exquisite petals and a cruel economy compels it to give up its sweet perfume. It has no time to flaunt its finery, for it is busy beyond measure. Viewed from without, necessity seems to be the only factor in nature for which everything works and moves. There the bud develops into the flower, the flower into the fruit, the fruit into the seed, the seed into a new plant again, and so forth, the chain of activity running on unbroken. Should there crop up any disturbance or impediment, no excuse would be accepted, and

the unfortunate thing thus choked in its movement would at once be labelled as rejected, and be bound to die and disappear post− haste. In the great office of nature there are innumerable departments with endless work going on, and the fine flower that you behold there, gaudily attired and scented like a dandy, is by no means what it appears to be, but rather, is like a labourer toiling in sun and shower, who has to submit a clear account of his work and has no breathing space to enjoy himself in playful frolic.

But when this same flower enters the heart of men its aspect of busy practicality is gone, and it becomes the very emblem of leisure and repose. The same object that is the embodiment of endless activity without is the perfect expression of beauty and peace within.

Science here warns us that we are mistaken, that the purpose of a flower is nothing but what is outwardly manifested, and that the relation of beauty and sweetness which we think it bears to us is all our own making, gratuitous and imaginary.

But our heart replies that we are not in the least mistaken. In the sphere of nature the flower carries with it a certificate which recommends it as having immense capacity for doing useful work, but it brings an altogether different letter of introduction when it knocks at the door of our hearts. Beauty becomes its only qualification. At one place it comes as a slave, and at another as a free thing. How, then, should we give credit to its first recommendation and disbelieve the second one? That the flower has got its being in the unbroken chain of causation is true beyond doubt; but that is an outer truth. The inner truth is: *Verily from the everlasting joy do all objects have their birth.* [Footnote: Anandadhyeva khalvimani bhutani jayante.]

A flower, therefore, has not its only function in nature, but has another great function to exercise in the mind of man. And what is that function? In nature its work is that of a servant who has to make his appearance at appointed times, but in the heart of man it comes like a messenger from the King. In the *Ramayana,* when *Sita,* forcibly separated from her husband, was bewailing her evil fate in *Ravana's* golden palace, she was met by a messenger who brought with him a ring of her beloved *Ramachandra* himself. The very sight of it convinced *Sita* of the truth of tidings he bore. She was at once reassured that he came indeed from her beloved one, who had not forgotten her and was at hand to rescue her.

Such a messenger is a flower from our great lover. Surrounded with the pomp and pageantry of worldliness, which may be linked to Ravana's golden city, we still live in exile, while the insolent spirit of worldly prosperity tempts us with allurements and claims us as its bride. In the meantime the flower comes across with a message from the other shore, and whispers in our ears, “I am come. He has sent me. I am a messenger of the beautiful, the one whose soul is the bliss of love. This island of isolation has been bridged over by him, and he has not forgotten thee, and will rescue thee even now. He will draw thee unto him and make thee his own. This illusion will not hold thee in thraldom for ever.”

If we happen to be awake then, we question him: “How are we to know that thou art come from him indeed?” The messenger says, “Look! I have this ring from him. How lovely are its hues and charms!”

Ah, doubtless it is his—indeed, it is our wedding ring. Now all else passes into oblivion, only this sweet symbol of the touch of the eternal love fills us with a deep longing. We realise that the palace of gold where we are has nothing to do with us—our deliverance is outside it—and there our love has its fruition and our life its fulfilment.

What to the bee in nature is merely colour and scent, and the marks or spots which show the right track to the honey, is to the human heart beauty and joy untrammelled by necessity. They bring a love letter to the heart written in many−coloured inks.

I was telling you, therefore, that however busy our active nature outwardly may be, she has a secret chamber within the heart where she comes and goes freely, without any design whatsoever. There the fire of her workshop is transformed into lamps of a festival, the noise of her factory is heard like music. The iron chain of cause and effect sounds heavily outside in nature, but in the human heart its unalloyed delight seems to sound, as it were, like the golden strings of a harp.

It indeed seems to be wonderful that nature has these two aspects at one and the same time, and so antithetical—one being of thraldom and the other of freedom. In the same form, sound, colour, and taste two contrary notes are heard, one of necessity and the other of joy. Outwardly nature is busy and restless, inwardly she is all silence and peace. She has toil on one side and leisure on the other. You see her bondage only when you see her from without, but within her heart is a limitless beauty.

Our seer says, “From joy are born all creatures, by joy they are sustained, towards joy they progress, and into joy they enter.”

Not that he ignores law, or that his contemplation of this infinite joy is born of the intoxication produced by an indulgence in abstract thought. He fully recognises the inexorable laws of nature, and says, “Fire burns for fear of him (i.e. by his law); the sun shines by fear of him; and for fear of him the wind, the clouds, and death perform their offices.” It is a reign of iron rule, ready to punish the least transgression. Yet the poet chants the glad song, “From joy are born all creatures, by joy they are sustained, towards joy they progress, and into joy they enter.”

The immortal being manifests himself in joy−form. [Footnote: Anandarupamamritam yad vibhati.] His manifestation in creation is out of his fullness of joy. It is the nature of this abounding joy to realise itself in form which is law. The joy, which is without form, must create, must translate itself into forms. The joy of the singer is expressed in the form of a song, that of the poet in the form of a poem. Man in his role of a creator is ever creating forms, and they come out of his abounding joy.

This joy, whose other name is love, must by its very nature have duality for its realisation. When the singer has his inspiration he makes himself into two; he has within him his other self as the hearer, and the outside audience is merely an extension of this other self of his. The lover seeks his own other self in his beloved. It is the joy that creates this separation, in order to realise through obstacles of union.

The *amritam*, the immortal bliss, has made himself into two. Our soul is the loved one, it is his other self. We are separate; but if this separation were absolute, then there would have been absolute misery and unmitigated evil in this world. Then from untruth we never could reach truth, and from sin we never could hope to attain purity of heart; then all opposites would ever remain opposites, and we could never find a medium through which our differences could ever tend to meet. Then we could have no language, no understanding, no blending of hearts, no co−operation in life. But on the contrary, we find that the separateness of objects is in a fluid state. Their individualities are even changing, they are meeting and merging into each other, till science itself is turning into metaphysics, matter losing its boundaries, and the definition of life becoming more and more indefinite.

Yes, our individual soul has been separated from the supreme soul, but this has not been from alienation but from the fullness of love. It is for that reason that untruths, sufferings, and evils are not at a standstill; the human soul can defy them, can overcome them, nay, can altogether transform them into new power and beauty.

The singer is translating his song into singing, his joy into forms, and the hearer has to translate back the singing into the original joy; then the communion between the singer and the hearer is complete. The infinite joy is manifesting itself in manifold forms, taking upon itself the bondage of law, and we fulfil our destiny

when we go back from forms to joy, from law to the love, when we untie the knot of the finite and hark back to the infinite.

The human soul is on its journey from the law to love, from discipline to liberation, from the moral plane to the spiritual. Buddha preached the discipline of self−restraint and moral life; it is a complete acceptance of law. But this bondage of law cannot be an end by itself; by mastering it thoroughly we acquire the means of getting beyond it. It is going back to Brahma, to the infinite love, which is manifesting itself through the finite forms of law. Buddha names it *Brahma−vihara*, the joy of living in Brahma. He who wants to reach this stage, according to Buddha, "shall deceive none, entertain no hatred for anybody, and never wish to injure through anger. He shall have measureless love for all creatures, even as a mother has for her only child, whom she protects with her own life. Up above, below, and all around him he shall extend his love, which is without bounds and obstacles, and which is free from all cruelty and antagonism. While standing, sitting, walking, lying down, till he fall asleep, he shall keep his mind active in this exercise of universal goodwill."

Want of love is a degree of callousness; for love is the perfection of consciousness. We do not love because we do not comprehend, or rather we do not comprehend because we do not love. For love is the ultimate meaning of everything around us. It is not a mere sentiment; it is truth; it is the joy that is at the root of all creation. It is the white light of pure consciousness that emanates from Brahma. So, to be one with this *sarvanubhuh*, this all−feeling being who is in the external sky, as well as in our inner soul, we must attain to that summit of consciousness, which is love: *Who could have breathed or moved if the sky were not filled with joy, with love?* [Footnote: Ko hyevanyat kah pranyat yadesha akaca anando na syat.] It is through the heightening of our consciousness into love, and extending it all over the world, that we can attain *Brahma−vihara,* communion with this infinite joy.

Love spontaneously gives itself in endless gifts. But these gifts lose their fullest significance if through them we do not reach that love, which is the giver. To do that, we must have love in our own heart. He who has no love in him values the gifts of his lover only according to their usefulness. But utility is temporary and partial. It can never occupy our whole being; what is useful only touches us at the point where we have some want. When the want is satisfied, utility becomes a burden if it still persists. On the other hand, a mere token is of permanent worth to us when we have love in our heart. For it is not for any special use. It is an end in itself; it is for our whole being and therefore can never tire us.

The question is, In what manner do we accept this world, which is a perfect gift of joy? Have we been able to receive it in our heart where we keep enshrined things that are of deathless value to us? We are frantically busy making use of the forces of the universe to gain more and more power; we feed and we clothe ourselves from its stores, we scramble for its riches, and it becomes for us a field of fierce competition. But were we born for this, to extend our proprietary rights over this world and make of it a marketable commodity? When our whole mind is bent only upon making use of this world it loses for us its true value. We make it cheap by our sordid desires; and thus to the end of our days we only try to feed upon it and miss its truth, just like the greedy child who tears leaves from a precious book and tries to swallow them.

In the lands where cannibalism is prevalent man looks upon man as his food. In such a country civilisation can never thrive, for there man loses his higher value and is made common indeed. But there are other kinds of cannibalism, perhaps not so gross, but not less heinous, for which one need not travel far. In countries higher in the scale of civilisation we find sometimes man looked upon as a mere body, and he is bought and sold in the market by the price of his flesh only. And sometimes he gets his sole value from being useful; he is made into a machine, and is traded upon by the man of money to acquire for him more money. Thus our lust, our greed, our love of comfort result in cheapening man to his lowest value. It is self deception on a large scale. Our desires blind us to the *truth* that there is in man, and this is the greatest wrong done by ourselves to our own soul. It deadens our consciousness, and is but a gradual method of spiritual suicide. It produces ugly sores in the body of civilisation, gives rise to its hovels and brothels, its vindictive penal codes, its cruel prison

systems, its organised method of exploiting foreign races to the extent of permanently injuring them by depriving them of the discipline of self− government and means of self−defence.

Of course man is useful to man, because his body is a marvellous machine and his mind an organ of wonderful efficiency. But he is a spirit as well, and this spirit is truly known only by love. When we define a man by the market value of the service we can expect of him, we know him imperfectly. With this limited knowledge of him it becomes easy for us to be unjust to him and to entertain feelings of triumphant self−congratulation when, on account of some cruel advantage on our side, we can get out of him much more than we have paid for. But when we know him as a spirit we know him as our own. We at once feel that cruelty to him is cruelty to ourselves, to make him small is stealing from our own humanity, and in seeking to make use of him solely for personal profit we merely gain in money or comfort what we pay in truth.

One day I was out in a boat on the Ganges. It was a beautiful evening in autumn. The sun had just set; the silence of the sky was full to the brim with ineffable peace and beauty. The vast expanse of water was without a ripple, mirroring all the changing shades of the sunset glow. Miles and miles of a desolate sandbank lay like a huge amphibious reptile of some antediluvian age, with its scales glistening in shining colours. As our boat was silently gliding by the precipitous river−bank, riddled with the nest−holes of a colony of birds, suddenly a big fish leapt up to the surface of the water and then disappeared, displaying on its vanishing figure all the colours of the evening sky. It drew aside for a moment the many−coloured screen behind which there was a silent world full of the joy of life. It came up from the depths of its mysterious dwelling with a beautiful dancing motion and added its own music to the silent symphony of the dying day. I felt as if I had a friendly greeting from an alien world in its own language, and it touched my heart with a flash of gladness. Then suddenly the man at the helm exclaimed with a distinct note of regret, “Ah, what a big fish!” It at once brought before his vision the picture of the fish caught and made ready for his supper. He could only look at the fish through his desire, and thus missed the whole truth of its existence. But man is not entirely an animal. He aspires to a spiritual vision, which is the vision of the whole truth. This gives him the highest delight, because it reveals to him the deepest harmony that exists between him and his surroundings. It is our desires that limit the scope of our self−realisation, hinder our extension of consciousness, and give rise to sin, which is the innermost barrier that keeps us apart from our God, setting up disunion and the arrogance of exclusiveness. For sin is not one mere action, but it is an attitude of life which takes for granted that our goal is finite, that our self is the ultimate truth, and that we are not all essentially one but exist each for his own separate individual existence.

So I repeat we never can have a true view of man unless we have a love for him. Civilisation must be judged and prized, not by the amount of power it has developed, but by how much it has evolved and given expression to, by its laws and institutions, the love of humanity. The first question and the last which it has to answer is, Whether and how far it recognises man more as a spirit than a machine? Whenever some ancient civilisation fell into decay and died, it was owing to causes which produced callousness of heart and led to the cheapening of man's worth; when either the state or some powerful group of men began to look upon the people as a mere instrument of their power; when, by compelling weaker races to slavery and trying to keep them down by every means, man struck at the foundation of his greatness, his own love of freedom and fair−play. Civilisation can never sustain itself upon cannibalism of any form. For that by which alone man is true can only be nourished by love and justice.

As with man, so with this universe. When we look at the world through the veil of our desires we make it small and narrow, and fail to perceive its full truth. Of course it is obvious that the world serves us and fulfils our needs, but our relation to it does not end there. We are bound to it with a deeper and truer bond than that of necessity. Our soul is drawn to it; our love of life is really our wish to continue our relation with this great world. This relation is one of love. We are glad that we are in it; we are attached to it with numberless threads, which extend from this earth to the stars. Man foolishly tries to prove his superiority by imagining his radical separateness from what he calls his physical world, which, in his blind fanaticism, he sometimes goes to the

extent of ignoring altogether, holding it at his direst enemy. Yet the more his knowledge progresses, the more it becomes difficult for man to establish this separateness, and all the imaginary boundaries he had set up around himself vanish one after another. Every time we lose some of our badges of absolute distinction by which we conferred upon our humanity the right to hold itself apart from its surroundings, it gives us a shock of humiliation. But we have to submit to this. If we set up our pride on the path of our self−realisation to create divisions and disunion, then it must sooner or later come under the wheels of truth and be ground to dust. No, we are not burdened with some monstrous superiority, unmeaning in its singular abruptness. It would be utterly degrading for us to live in a world immeasurably less than ourselves in the quality of soul, just as it would be repulsive and degrading to be surrounded and served by a host of slaves, day and night, from birth to the moment of death. On the contrary, this world is our compeer, nay, we are one with it.

Through our progress in science the wholeness of the world and our oneness with it is becoming clearer to our mind. When this perception of the perfection of unity is not merely intellectual, when it opens out our whole being into a luminous consciousness of the all, then it becomes a radiant joy, an overspreading love. Our spirit finds its larger self in the whole world, and is filled with an absolute certainty that it is immortal. It dies a hundred times in its enclosures of self; for separateness is doomed to die, it cannot be made eternal. But it never can die where it is one with the all, for there is its truth, its joy. When a man feels the rhythmic throb of the soul−life of the whole world in his own soul, then is he free. Then he enters into the secret courting that goes on between this beautiful world−bride, veiled with the veil of the many−coloured finiteness, and the *paramatmam*, the bridegroom, in his spotless white. Then he knows that he is the partaker of this gorgeous love festival, and he is the honoured guest at the feast of immortality. Then he understands the meaning of the seer−poet who sings, “From love the world is born, by love it is sustained, towards love it moves, and into love it enters.”

In love all the contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost. Only in love are unity and duality not at variance. Love must be one and two at the same time.

Only love is motion and rest in one. Our heart ever changes its place till it finds love, and then it has its rest. But this rest itself is an intense form of activity where utter quiescence and unceasing energy meet at the same point in love.

In love, loss and gain are harmonised. In its balance−sheet, credit and debit accounts are in the same column, and gifts are added to gains. In this wonderful festival of creation, this great ceremony of self−sacrifice of God, the lover constantly gives himself up to gain himself in love. Indeed, love is what brings together and inseparably connects both the act of abandoning and that of receiving.

In love, at one of its poles you find the personal, and at the other the impersonal. At one you have the positive assertion— Here I am; at the other the equally strong denial—I am not. Without this ego what is love? And again, with only this ego how can love be possible?

Bondage and liberation are not antagonistic in love. For love is most free and at the same time most bound. If God were absolutely free there would be no creation. The infinite being has assumed unto himself the mystery of finitude. And in him who is love the finite and the infinite are made one.

Similarly, when we talk about the relative values of freedom and non−freedom, it becomes a mere play of words. It is not that we desire freedom alone, we want thraldom as well. It is the high function of love to welcome all limitations and to transcend them. For nothing is more independent than love, and where else, again, shall we find so much of dependence? In love, thraldom is as glorious as freedom.

The *Vaishnava* religion has boldly declared that God has bound himself to man, and in that consists the greatest glory of human existence. In the spell of the wonderful rhythm of the finite he fetters himself at every

step, and thus gives his love out in music in his most perfect lyrics of beauty. Beauty is his wooing of our heart; it can have no other purpose. It tells us everywhere that the display of power is not the ultimate meaning of creation; wherever there is a bit of colour, a note of song, a grace of form, there comes the call for our love. Hunger compels us to obey its behests, but hunger is not the last word for a man. There have been men who have deliberately defied its commands to show that the human soul is not to be led by the pressure of wants and threat of pain. In fact, to live the life of man we have to resist its demands every day, the least of us as well as the greatest. But, on the other hand, there is a beauty in the world which never insults our freedom, never raises even its little finger to make us acknowledge its sovereignty. We can absolutely ignore it and suffer no penalty in consequence. It is a call to us, but not a command. It seeks for love in us, and love can never be had by compulsion. Compulsion is not indeed the final appeal to man, but joy is. Any joy is everywhere; it is in the earth's green covering of grass; in the blue serenity of the sky; in the reckless exuberance of spring; in the severe abstinence of grey winter; in the living flesh that animates our bodily frame; in the perfect poise of the human figure, noble and upright; in living; in the exercise of all our powers; in the acquisition of knowledge; in fighting evils; in dying for gains we never can share. Joy is there everywhere; it is superfluous, unnecessary; nay, it very often contradicts the most peremptory behests of necessity. It exists to show that the bonds of law can only be explained by love; they are like body and soul. Joy is the realisation of the truth of oneness, the oneness of our soul with the world and of the world−soul with the supreme lover.

VI. REALISATION IN ACTION

It is only those who have known that joy expresses itself through law who have learnt to transcend the law. Not that the bonds of law have ceased to exist for them—but that the bonds have become to them as the form of freedom incarnate. The freed soul delights in accepting bonds, and does not seek to evade any of them, for in each does it feel the manifestation of an infinite energy whose joy is in creation.

As a matter of fact, where there are no bonds, where there is the madness of license, the soul ceases to be free. There is its hurt; there is its separation from the infinite, its agony of sin. Whenever at the call of temptation the soul falls away from the bondage of law, then, like a child deprived of the support of its mother's arms, it cries out, *Smite me not!* [Footnote: Ma ma himsih.] “Bind me,” it prays, “oh, bind me in the bonds of thy law; bind me within and without; hold me tight; let me in the clasp of thy law be bound up together with thy joy; protect me by thy firm hold from the deadly laxity of sin.”

As some, under the idea that law is the opposite of joy, mistake intoxication for joy, so there are many in our country who imagine action to be opposed to freedom. They think that activity being in the material plane is a restriction of the free spirit of the soul. But we must remember that as joy expresses itself in law, so the soul finds its freedom in action. It is because joy cannot find expression in itself alone that it desires the law which is outside. Likewise it is because the soul cannot find freedom within itself that it wants external action. The soul of man is ever freeing itself from its own folds by its activity; had it been otherwise it could not have done any voluntary work.

The more man acts and makes actual what was latent in him, the nearer does he bring the distant Yet−to−be. In that actualisation man is ever making himself more and yet more distinct, and seeing himself clearly under newer and newer aspects in the midst of his varied activities, in the state, in society. This vision makes for freedom.

Freedom is not in darkness, nor in vagueness. There is no bondage so fearful as that of obscurity. It is to escape from this obscurity that the seed struggles to sprout, the bud to blossom. It is to rid itself of this envelope of vagueness that the ideas in our mind are constantly seeking opportunities to take on outward form. In the same way our soul, in order to release itself from the mist of indistinctness and come out into the

open, is continually creating for itself fresh fields of action, and is busy contriving new forms of activity, even such as are not needful for the purposes of its earthly life. And why? Because it wants freedom. It wants to see itself, to realise itself.

When man cuts down the pestilential jungle and makes unto himself a garden, the beauty that he thus sets free from within its enclosure of ugliness is the beauty of his own soul: without giving it this freedom outside, he cannot make it free within. When he implants law and order in the midst of the waywardness of society, the good which he sets free from the obstruction of the bad is the goodness of his own soul: without being thus made free outside it cannot find freedom within. Thus is man continually engaged in setting free in action his powers, his beauty, his goodness, his very soul. And the more he succeeds in so doing, the greater does he see himself to be, the broader becomes the field of his knowledge of self.

The Upanishad says: *In the midst of activity alone wilt thou desire to live a hundred years.* [Footnote: Kurvanneveha karmani jijivishet catam samah.] It is the saying of those who had amply tasted of the joy of the soul. Those who have fully realised the soul have never talked in mournful accents of the sorrowfulness of life or of the bondage of action. They are not like the weakling flower whose stem−hold is so light that it drops away before attaining fruition. They hold on to life with all their might and say, “never will we let go till the fruit is ripe.” They desire in their joy to express themselves strenuously in their life and in their work. Pain and sorrow dismay them not, they are not bowed down to the dust by the weight of their own heart. With the erect head of the victorious hero they march through life seeing themselves and showing themselves in increasing resplendence of soul through both joys and sorrows. The joy of their life keeps step with the joy of that energy which is playing at building and breaking throughout the universe. The joy of the sunlight, the joy of the free air, mingling with the joy of their lives, makes one sweet harmony reign within and without. It is they who say, *In the midst of activity alone wilt thou desire to live a hundred years.*

This joy of life, this joy of work, in man is absolutely true. It is no use saying that it is a delusion of ours; that unless we cast it away we cannot enter upon the path of self−realisation. It will never do the least good to attempt the realisation of the infinite apart from the world of action.

It is not the truth that man is active on compulsion. If there is compulsion on one side, on the other there is pleasure; on the one hand action is spurred on by want, on the other it hies to its natural fulfilment. That is why, as man's civilisation advances, he increases his obligations and the work that he willingly creates for himself. One should have thought that nature had given him quite enough to do to keep him busy, in fact that it was working him to death with the lash of hunger and thirst,—but no. Man does not think that sufficient; he cannot rest content with only doing the work that nature prescribes for him in common with the birds and beasts. He needs must surpass all, even in activity. No creature has to work so hard as man; he has been impelled to contrive for himself a vast field of action in society; and in this field he is for every building up and pulling down, making and unmaking laws, piling up heaps of material, and incessantly thinking, seeking and suffering. In this field he has fought his mightiest battles, gained continual new life, made death glorious, and, far from evading troubles, has willingly and continually taken up the burden of fresh trouble. He has discovered the truth that he is not complete in the cage of his immediate surroundings, that he is greater than his present, and that while to stand still in one place may be comforting, the arrest of life destroys his true function and the real purpose of his existence.

This *mahati vinashtih—this great destruction* he cannot bear, and accordingly he toils and suffers in order that he may gain in stature by transcending his present, in order to become that which he yet is not. In this travail is man's glory, and it is because he knows it, that he has not sought to circumscribe his field of action, but is constantly occupied in extending the bounds. Sometimes he wanders so far that his work tends to lose its meaning, and his rushings to and fro create fearful eddies round different centres—eddies of self−interest, of pride of power. Still, so long as the strength of the current is not lost, there is no fear; the obstructions and the dead accumulations of his activity are dissipated and carried away; the impetus corrects its own mistakes.

Only when the soul sleeps in stagnation do its enemies gain overmastering strength, and these obstructions become too clogging to be fought through. Hence have we been warned by our teachers that to work we must live, to live we must work; that life and activity are inseparably connected.

It is very characteristic of life that it is not complete within itself; it must come out. Its truth is in the commerce of the inside and the outside. In order to live, the body must maintain its various relations with the outside light and air—not only to gain life−force, but also to manifest it. Consider how fully employed the body is with its own inside activities; its heart− beat must not stop for a second, its stomach, its brain, must be ceaselessly working. Yet this is not enough; the body is outwardly restless all the while. Its life leads it to an endless dance of work and play outside; it cannot be satisfied with the circulations of its internal economy, and only finds the fulfilment of joy in its outward excursions.

The same with the soul. It cannot live on its own internal feelings and imaginings. It is ever in need of external objects; not only to feed its inner consciousness but to apply itself in action, not only to receive but also to give.

The real truth is, we cannot live if we divide him who is truth itself into two parts. We must abide in him within as well as without. In whichever aspect we deny him we deceive ourselves and incur a loss. *Brahma has not left me, let me not leave Brahma.* [Footnote: Maham brahma nirakuryyam ma ma brahma nirakarot.] If we say that we would realise him in introspection alone and leave him out of our external activity, that we would enjoy him by the love in our heart, but not worship him by outward ministrations; or if we say the opposite, and overweight ourselves on one side in the journey of our life's quest, we shall alike totter to our downfall.

In the great western continent we see that the soul of man is mainly concerned with extending itself outwards; the open field of the exercise of power is its field. Its partiality is entirely for the world of extension, and it would leave aside— nay, hardly believe in—that field of inner consciousness which is the field of fulfilment. It has gone so far in this that the perfection of fulfilment seems to exist for it nowhere. Its science has always talked of the never−ending evolution of the world. Its metaphysic has now begun to talk of the evolution of God himself. They will not admit that he *is*; they would have it that he also is *becoming.*

They fail to realise that while the infinite is always greater than any assignable limit, it is also complete; that on the one hand Brahma is evolving, on the other he is perfection; that in the one aspect he is essence, in the other manifestation—both together at the same time, as is the song and the act of singing. This is like ignoring the consciousness of the singer and saying that only the singing is in progress, that there is no song. Doubtless we are directly aware only of the singing, and never at any one time of the song as a whole; but do we not all the time know that the complete song is in the soul of the singer?

It is because of this insistence on the doing and the becoming that we perceive in the west the intoxication of power. These men seem to have determined to despoil and grasp everything by force. They would always obstinately be doing and never be done— they would not allow to death its natural place in the scheme of things—they know not the beauty of completion.

In our country the danger comes from the opposite side. Our partiality is for the internal world. We would cast aside with contumely the field of power and of extension. We would realise Brahma in mediation only in his aspect of completeness, we have determined not to see him in the commerce of the universe in his aspect of evolution. That is why in our seekers we so often find the intoxication of the spirit and its consequent degradation. Their faith would acknowledge no bondage of law, their imagination soars unrestricted, their conduct disdains to offer any explanation to reason. Their intellect, in its vain attempts to see Brahma inseparable from his creation, works itself stone− dry, and their heart, seeking to confine him within its own outpourings, swoons in a drunken ecstasy of emotion. They have not even kept within reach any standard

whereby they can measure the loss of strength and character which manhood sustains by thus ignoring the bonds of law and the claims of action in the external universe.

But true spirituality, as taught in our sacred lore, is calmly balanced in strength, in the correlation of the within and the without. The truth has its law, it has its joy. On one side of it is being chanted the *Bhayadasyagnistapati* [Footnote: “For fear of him the fire doth burn,” etc], on the other the *Anandadhyeva khalvimani bhutani jayante.* [Footnote: “From Joy are born all created things,” etc.] Freedom is impossible of attainment without submission to law, for Brahma is in one aspect bound by his truth, in the other free in his joy.

As for ourselves, it is only when we wholly submit to the bonds of truth that we fully gain the joy of freedom. And how? As does the string that is bound to the harp. When the harp is truly strung, when there is not the slightest laxity in the strength of the bond, then only does music result; and the string transcending itself in its melody finds at every chord its true freedom. It is because it is bound by such hard and fast rules on the one side that it can find this range of freedom in music on the other. While the string was not true, it was indeed merely bound; but a loosening of its bondage would not have been the way to freedom, which it can only fully achieve by being bound tighter and tighter till it has attained the true pitch.

The bass and treble strings of our duty are only bonds so long as we cannot maintain them steadfastly attuned according to the law of truth; and we cannot call by the name of freedom the loosening of them into the nothingness of inaction. That is why I would say that the true striving in the quest of truth, of *dharma*, consists not in the neglect of action but in the effort to attune it closer and closer to the eternal harmony. The text of this striving should be, *Whatever works thou doest, consecrate them to Brahma.* [Footnote: Yadyat karma prakurvita tadbrahmani samarpayet.] That is to say, the soul is to dedicate itself to Brahma through all its activities. This dedication is the song of the soul, in this is its freedom. Joy reigns when all work becomes the path to the union with Brahma; when the soul ceases to return constantly to its own desires; when in it our self−offering grows more and more intense. Then there is completion, then there is freedom, then, in this world, comes the kingdom of God.

Who is there that, sitting in his corner, would deride this grand self−expression of humanity in action, this incessant self−consecration? Who is there that thinks the union of God and man is to be found in some secluded enjoyment of his own imaginings, away from the sky−towering temple of the greatness of humanity, which the whole of mankind, in sunshine and storm, is toiling to erect through the ages? Who is there that thinks this secluded communion is the highest form of religion?

O thou distraught wanderer, thou *Sannyasin*, drunk in the wine of self−intoxication, dost thou not already hear the progress of the human soul along the highway traversing the wide fields of humanity—the thunder of its progress in the car of its achievements, which is destined to overpass the bounds that prevent its expansion into the universe? The very mountains are cleft asunder and give way before the march of its banners waving triumphantly in the heavens; as the mist before the rising sun, the tangled obscurities of material things vanish at its irresistible approach. Pain, disease, and disorder are at every step receding before its onset; the obstructions of ignorance are being thrust aside; the darkness of blindness is being pierced through; and behold, the promised land of wealth and health, of poetry and art, of knowledge and righteousness is gradually being revealed to view. Do you in your lethargy desire to say that this car of humanity, which is shaking the very earth with the triumph of its progress along the mighty vistas of history, has no charioteer leading it on to its fulfilment? Who is there who refuses to respond to his call to join in this triumphal progress? Who so foolish as to run away from the gladsome throng and seek him in the listlessness of inaction? Who so steeped in untruth as to dare to call all this untrue—this great world of men, this civilisation of expanding humanity, this eternal effort of man, through depths of sorrow, through heights of gladness, through innumerable impediments within and without, to win victory for his powers? He who can think of this immensity of achievement as an immense fraud, can he truly believe in God who is the truth? He who thinks to reach God

by running away from the world, when and where does he expect to meet him? How far can he fly—can he fly and fly, till he flies into nothingness itself? No, the coward who would fly can nowhere find him. We must be brave enough to be able to say: We are reaching him here in this very spot, now at this very moment. We must be able to assure ourselves that as in our actions we are realising ourselves, so in ourselves we are realising him who is the self of self. We must earn the right to say so unhesitatingly by clearing away with our own effort all obstruction, all disorder, all discords from our path of activity; we must be able to say, "In my work is my joy, and in that joy does the joy of my joy abide."

Whom does the Upanishad call *The chief among the knowers of Brahma?* [Footnote: Brahmavidamvaristhah.] He is defined as *He whose joy is in Brahma, whose play is in Brahma, the active one.* [Footnote: Atmakrirha atmaratih kriyavan.] Joy without the play of joy is no joy at all—play without activity is no play. Activity is the play of joy. He whose joy is in Brahma, how can he live in inaction? For must he not by his activity provide that in which the joy of Brahma is to take form and manifest itself? That is why he who knows Brahma, who has his joy in Brahma, must also have all his activity in Brahma—his eating and drinking, his earning of livelihood and his beneficence. Just as the joy of the poet in his poem, of the artist in his art, of the brave man in the output of his courage, of the wise man in his discernment of truths, ever seeks expression in their several activities, so the joy of the knower of Brahma, in the whole of his everyday work, little and big, in truth, in beauty, in orderliness and in beneficence, seeks to give expression to the infinite.

Brahma himself gives expression to his joy in just the same way. *By his many−sided activity, which radiates in all directions, does he fulfil the inherent want of his different creatures.* [Footnote: Bahudha cakti yogat varnananekan nihitartho dadhati.] That inherent want is he himself, and so he is in so many ways, in so many forms, giving himself. He works, for without working how could he give himself. His joy is ever dedicating itself in the dedication which is his creation.

In this very thing does our own true meaning lie, in this is our likeness to our father. We must also give up ourselves in many− sided variously aimed activity. In the Vedas he is called *the giver of himself, the giver of strength.* [Footnote: Atmada balada.] He is not content with giving us himself, but he gives us strength that we may likewise give ourselves. That is why the seer of the Upanishad prays to him who is thus fulfilling our wants, *May he grant us the beneficent mind* [Footnote: Sa no buddhya cubhaya samyunaktu.], may he fulfil that uttermost want of ours by granting us the beneficent mind. That is to say, it is not enough he should alone work to remove our want, but he should give us the desire and the strength to work with him in his activity and in the exercise of the goodness. Then, indeed, will our union with him alone be accomplished. The beneficent mind is that which shows us the want (*swartha*) of another self to be the inherent want (*nihitartha*) of our own self; that which shows that our joy consists in the varied aiming of our many−sided powers in the work of humanity. When we work under the guidance of this beneficent mind, then our activity is regulated, but does not become mechanical; it is action not goaded on by want, but stimulated by the satisfaction of the soul. Such activity ceases to be a blind imitation of that of the multitude, a cowardly following of the dictates of fashion. Therein we begin to see that *He is in the beginning and in the end of the universe* [Footnote: Vichaiti chante vicvamadau.], and likewise see that of our own work is he the fount and the inspiration, and at the end thereof is he, and therefore that all our activity is pervaded by peace and good and joy.

The Upanishad says: *Knowledge, power, and action are of his nature.* [Footnote: Svabhavikijnana bala kriya cha.] It is because this naturalness has not yet been born in us that we tend to divide joy from work. Our day of work is not our day of joy— for that we require a holiday; for, miserable that we are, we cannot find our holiday in our work. The river finds its holiday in its onward flow, the fire in its outburst of flame, the scent of the flower in its permeation of the atmosphere; but in our everyday work there is no such holiday for us. It is because we do not let ourselves go, because we do not give ourselves joyously and entirely up to it, that our work overpowers us.

O giver of thyself! at the vision of thee as joy let our souls flame up to thee as the fire, flow on to thee as the river, permeate thy being as the fragrance of the flower. Give us strength to love, to love fully, our life in its joys and sorrows, in its gains and losses, in its rise and fall. Let us have strength enough fully to see and hear thy universe, and to work with full vigour therein. Let us fully live the life thou hast given us, let us bravely take and bravely give. This is our prayer to thee. Let us once for all dislodge from our minds the feeble fancy that would make out thy joy to be a thing apart from action, thin, formless, and unsustained. Wherever the peasant tills the hard earth, there does thy joy gush out in the green of the corn, wherever man displaces the entangled forest, smooths the stony ground, and clears for himself a homestead, there does thy joy enfold it in orderliness and peace.

O worker of the universe! We would pray to thee to let the irresistible current of thy universal energy come like the impetuous south wind of spring, let it come rushing over the vast field of the life of man, let it bring the scent of many flowers, the murmurings of many woodlands, let it make sweet and vocal the lifelessness of our dried−up soul−life. Let our newly awakened powers cry out for unlimited fulfilment in leaf and flower and fruit.

VII. THE REALISATION OF BEAUTY

Things in which we do not take joy are either a burden upon our minds to be got rid of at any cost; or they are useful, and therefore in temporary and partial relation to us, becoming burdensome when their utility is lost; or they are like wandering vagabonds, loitering for a moment on the outskirts of our recognition, and then passing on. A thing is only completely our own when it is a thing of joy to us.

The greater part of this world is to us as if it were nothing. But we cannot allow it to remain so, for thus it belittles our own self. The entire world is given to us, and all our powers have their final meaning in the faith that by their help we are to take possession of our patrimony.

But what is the function of our sense of beauty in this process of the extension of our consciousness? Is it there to separate truth into strong lights and shadows, and bring it before us in its uncompromising distinction of beauty and ugliness? If that were so, then we would have had to admit that this sense of beauty creates a dissension in our universe and sets up a wall of hindrance across the highway of communication that leads from everything to all things.

But that cannot be true. As long as our realisation is incomplete a division necessarily remains between things known and unknown, pleasant and unpleasant. But in spite of the dictum of some philosophers man does not accept any arbitrary and absolute limit to his knowable world. Every day his science is penetrating into the region formerly marked in his map as unexplored or inexplorable. Our sense of beauty is similarly engaged in ever pushing on its conquests. Truth is everywhere, therefore everything is the object of our knowledge. Beauty is omnipresent, therefore everything is capable of giving us joy.

In the early days of his history man took everything as a phenomenon of life. His science of life began by creating a sharp distinction between life and non−life. But as it is proceeding farther and farther the line of demarcation between the animate and inanimate is growing more and more dim. In the beginning of our apprehension these sharp lines of contrast are helpful to us, but as our comprehension becomes clearer they gradually fade away.

The Upanishads have said that all things are created and sustained by an infinite joy. To realise this principle of creation we have to start with a division—the division into the beautiful and the non−beautiful. Then the apprehension of beauty has to come to us with a vigorous blow to awaken our consciousness from its primitive lethargy, and it attains its object by the urgency of the contrast. Therefore our first acquaintance with

beauty is in her dress of motley colours, that affects us with its stripes and feathers, nay, with its disfigurements. But as our acquaintance ripens, the apparent discords are resolved into modulations of rhythm. At first we detach beauty from its surroundings, we hold it apart from the rest, but at the end we realise its harmony with all. Then the music of beauty has no more need of exciting us with loud noise; it renounces violence, and appeals to our heart with the truth that it is meekness inherits the earth.

In some stage of our growth, in some period of our history, we try to set up a special cult of beauty, and pare it down to a narrow circuit, so as to make it a matter of pride for a chosen few. Then it breeds in its votaries affections and exaggerations, as it did with the Brahmins in the time of the decadence of Indian civilisation, when the perception of the higher truth fell away and superstitions grew up unchecked.

In the history of aesthetics there also comes an age of emancipation when the recognition of beauty in things great and small become easy, and when we see it more in the unassuming harmony of common objects than in things startling in their singularity. So much so, that we have to go through the stages of reaction when in the representation of beauty we try to avoid everything that is obviously pleasing and that has been crowned by the sanction of convention. We are then tempted in defiance to exaggerate the commonness of commonplace things, thereby making them aggressively uncommon. To restore harmony we create the discords which are a feature of all reactions. We already see in the present age the sign of this aesthetic reaction, which proves that man has at last come to know that it is only the narrowness of perception which sharply divides the field of his aesthetic consciousness into ugliness and beauty. When he has the power to see things detached from self−interest and from the insistent claims of the lust of the senses, then alone can he have the true vision of the beauty that is everywhere. Then only can he see that what is unpleasant to us is not necessarily unbeautiful, but has its beauty in truth.

When we say that beauty is everywhere we do not mean that the word ugliness should be abolished from our language, just as it would be absurd to say that there is no such thing as untruth. Untruth there certainly is, not in the system of the universe, but in our power of comprehension, as its negative element. In the same manner there is ugliness in the distorted expression of beauty in our life and in our art which comes from our imperfect realisation of Truth. To a certain extent we can set our life against the law of truth which is in us and which is in all, and likewise we can give rise to ugliness by going counter to the eternal law of harmony which is everywhere.

Through our sense of truth we realise law in creation, and through our sense of beauty we realise harmony in the universe. When we recognise the law in nature we extend our mastery over physical forces and become powerful; when we recognise the law in our moral nature we attain mastery over self and become free. In like manner the more we comprehend the harmony in the physical world the more our life shares the gladness of creation, and our expression of beauty in art becomes more truly catholic. As we become conscious of the harmony in our soul, our apprehension of the blissfulness of the spirit of the world becomes universal, and the expression of beauty in our life moves in goodness and love towards the infinite. This is the ultimate object of our existence, that we must ever know that “beauty is truth, truth beauty”; we must realise the whole world in love, for love gives it birth, sustains it, and takes it back to its bosom. We must have that perfect emancipation of heart which gives us the power to stand at the innermost centre of things and have the taste of that fullness of disinterested joy which belongs to Brahma.

Music is the purest form of art, and therefore the most direct expression of beauty, with a form and spirit which is one and simple, and least encumbered with anything extraneous. We seem to feel that the manifestation of the infinite in the finite forms of creation is music itself, silent and visible. The evening sky, tirelessly repeating the starry constellations, seems like a child struck with wonder at the mystery of its own first utterance, lisping the same word over and over again, and listening to it in unceasing joy. When in the rainy night of July the darkness is thick upon the meadows and the pattering rain draws veil upon veil over the stillness of the slumbering earth, this monotony of the rain patter seems to be the darkness of sound itself. The

gloom of the dim and dense line of trees, the thorny bushes scattered in the bare heath like floating heads of swimmers with bedraggled hair, the smell of the damp grass and the wet earth, the spire of the temple rising above the undefined mass of blackness grouped around the village huts—everything seems like notes rising from the heart of the night, mingling and losing themselves in the one sound of ceaseless rain filling the sky.

Therefore the true poets, they who are seers, seek to express the universe in terms of music.

They rarely use symbols of painting to express the unfolding of forms, the mingling of endless lines and colours that goes on every moment on the canvas of the blue sky.

They have their reason. For the man who paints must have canvas, brush and colour−box. The first touch of his brush is very far from the complete idea. And then when the work is finished the artist is gone, the windowed picture stands alone, the incessant touches of love of the creative hand are withdrawn.

But the singer has everything within him. The notes come out from his very life. They are not materials gathered from outside. His idea and his expression are brother and sister; very often they are born as twins. In music the heart reveals itself immediately; it suffers not from any barrier of alien material.

Therefore though music has to wait for its completeness like any other art, yet at every step it gives out the beauty of the whole. As the material of expression even words are barriers, for their meaning has to be constructed by thought. But music never has to depend upon any obvious meaning; it expresses what no words can ever express.

What is more, music and the musician are inseparable. When the singer departs, his singing dies with him; it is in eternal union with the life and joy of the master.

This world−song is never for a moment separated from its singer. It is not fashioned from any outward material. It is his joy itself taking never−ending form. It is the great heart sending the tremor of its thrill over the sky.

There is a perfection in each individual strain of this music, which is the revelation of completion in the incomplete. No one of its notes is final, yet each reflects the infinite.

What does it matter if we fail to derive the exact meaning of this great harmony? Is it not like the hand meeting the string and drawing out at once all its tones at the touch? It is the language of beauty, the caress, that comes from the heart of the world straightway reaches our heart.

Last night, in the silence which pervaded the darkness, I stood alone and heard the voice of the singer of eternal melodies. When I went to sleep I closed my eyes with this last thought in my mind, that even when I remain unconscious in slumber the dance of life will still go on in the hushed arena of my sleeping body, keeping step with the stars. The heart will throb, the blood will leap in the veins, and the millions of living atoms of my body will vibrate in tune with the note of the harp−string that thrills at the touch of the master.

VIII. THE REALISATION OF THE INFINITE

The Upanishads say: “Man becomes true if in this life he can apprehend God; if not, it is the greatest calamity for him.”

But what is the nature of this attainment of God? It is quite evident that the infinite is not like one object among many, to be definitely classified and kept among our possessions, to be used as an ally specially

favouring us in our politics, warfare, money−making, or in social competitions. We cannot put our God in the same list with our summer−houses, motor−cars, or our credit at the bank, as so many people seem to want to do.

We must try to understand the true character of the desire that a man has when his soul longs for his God. Does it consist of his wish to make an addition, however valuable, to his belongings? Emphatically no! It is an endlessly wearisome task, this continual adding to our stores. In fact, when the soul seeks God she seeks her final escape from this incessant gathering and heaping and never coming to an end. It is not an additional object the she seeks, but it is the *nityo 'nityanam,* the permanent in all that is impermanent, the *rasanam rasatamah,* the highest abiding joy unifying all enjoyments. Therefore when the Upanishads teach us to realise everything in Brahma, it is not to seek something extra, not to manufacture something new.

Know everything that there is in the universe as enveloped by God. [Footnote: Ichavasyamdiam sarvam yat kincha jagatyanjagat.] *Enjoy whatever is given by him and harbour not in your mind the greed for wealth which is not your own.* [Footnoe: Tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma gridhah kasyasviddhanam.]

When you know that whatever there is is filled by him and whatever you have is his gift, then you realise the infinite in the finite, and the giver in the gifts. Then you know that all the facts of the reality have their only meaning in the manifestation of the one truth, and all your possessions have their only significance for you, not in themselves but in the relation they establish with the infinite.

So it cannot be said that we can find Brahma as we find other objects; there is no question of searching from him in one thing in preference to another, in one place instead of somewhere else. We do not have to run to the grocer's shop for our morning light; we open our eyes and there it is; so we need only give ourselves up to find that Brahma is everywhere.

This is the reason why Buddha admonished us to free ourselves from the confinement of the life of the self. If there were nothing else to take its place more positively perfect and satisfying, then such admonition would be absolutely unmeaning. No man can seriously consider the advice, much less have any enthusiasm for it, of surrendering everything one has for gaining nothing whatever.

So our daily worship of God is not really the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service, in goodness and in love.

The Upanishads say: *Be lost altogether in Brahma like an arrow that has completely penetrated its target.* Thus to be conscious of being absolutely enveloped by Brahma is not an act of mere concentration of mind. It must be the aim of the whole of our life. In all our thoughts and deeds we must be conscious of the infinite. Let the realisation of this truth become easier every day of our life, that *none could live or move if the energy of the all−pervading joy did not fill the sky.* [Footnote: Ko hyevanyat kah pranyat yadesha akacha anando na syat.] In all our actions let us feel that impetus of the infinite energy and be glad.

It may be said that the infinite is beyond our attainment, so it is for us as if it were naught. Yes, if the word attainment implies any idea of possession, then it must be admitted that the infinite is unattainable. But we must keep in mind that the highest enjoyment of man is not in the having but in a getting, which is at the same time not getting. Our physical pleasures leave no margin for the unrealised. They, like the dead satellite of the earth, have but little atmosphere around them. When we take food and satisfy our hunger it is a complete act of possession. So long as the hunger is not satisfied it is a pleasure to eat. For then our enjoyment of eating touches at every point the infinite. But, when it attains completion, or in other words, when our desire for eating reaches the end of the stage of its non−realisation, it reaches the end of its pleasure. In all our intellectual pleasures the margin is broader, the limit is far off. In all our deeper love getting and non−getting

run ever parallel. In one of our Vaishnava lyrics the lover says to his beloved: “I feel as if I have gazed upon the beauty of thy face from my birth, yet my eyes are hungry still: as if I have kept thee pressed to my heart for millions of years, yet my heart is not satisfied.”

This makes it clear that it is really the infinite whom we seek in our pleasures. Our desire for being wealthy is not a desire for a particular sum of money but it is indefinite, and the most fleeting of our enjoyments are but the momentary touches of the eternal. The tragedy of human life consists in our vain attempts to stretch the limits of things which can never become unlimited,—to reach the infinite by absurdly adding to the rungs of the ladder of the finite.

It is evident from this that the real desire of our soul is to get beyond all our possessions. Surrounded by things she can touch and feel, she cries, “I am weary of getting; ah, where is he who is never to be got?”

We see everywhere in the history of man that the spirit of renunciation is the deepest reality of the human soul. When the soul says of anything, “I do not want it, for I am above it,” she gives utterance to the highest truth that is in her. When a girl's life outgrows her doll, when she realises that in every respect she is more than her doll is, then she throws it away. By the very act of possession we know that we are greater than the things we possess. It is a perfect misery to be kept bound up with things lesser than ourselves. This it is that Maitreyi felt when her husband gave her his property on the eve of leaving home. She asked him, “Would these material things help one to attain the highest?”—or, in other words, “Are they more than my soul to me?” When her husband answered, “They will make you rich in worldly possessions,” she said at once, “then what am I to do with these?” It is only when a man truly realises what his possessions are that he has no more illusions about them; then he knows his soul is far above these things and he becomes free from their bondage. Thus man truly realises his soul by outgrowing his possessions, and man's progress in the path of eternal life is through a series of renunciations.

That we cannot absolutely possess the infinite being is not a mere intellectual proposition. It has to be experienced, and this experience is bliss. The bird, while taking its flight in the sky, experiences at every beat of its wings that the sky is boundless, that its wings can never carry it beyond. Therein lies its joy. In the cage the sky is limited; it may be quite enough for all the purposes of the bird's life, only it is not more than is necessary. The bird cannot rejoice within the limits of the necessary. It must feel that what it has is immeasurably more than it ever can want or comprehend, and then only can it be glad.

Thus our soul must soar in the infinite, and she must feel every moment that in the sense of not being able to come to the end of her attainment is her supreme joy, her final freedom.

Man's abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to what is greater than himself, to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God. They make it easier for him to part with all that he has, not expecting his life. His existence is miserable and sordid till he finds some great idea which can truly claim his all, which can release him from all attachment to his belongings. Buddha and Jesus, and all our great prophets, represent such great ideas. They hold before us opportunities for surrendering our all. When they bring forth their divine alms−bowl we feel we cannot help giving, and we find that in giving is our truest joy and liberation, for it is uniting ourselves to that extent with the infinite.

Man is not complete; he is yet to be. In what he *is* he is small, and if we could conceive him stopping there for eternity we should have an idea of the most awful hell that man can imagine. In his *to be* he is infinite, there is his heaven, his deliverance. His *is* is occupied every moment with what it can get and have done with; his *to be* is hungering for something which is more than can be got, which he never can lose because he never has possessed.

The finite pole of our existence has its place in the world of necessity. There man goes about searching for food to live, clothing to get warmth. In this region—the region of nature—it is his function to get things. The natural man is occupied with enlarging his possessions.

But this act of getting is partial. It is limited to man's necessities. We can have a thing only to the extent of our requirements, just as a vessel can contain water only to the extent of its emptiness. Our relation to food is only in feeding, our relation to a house is only in habitation. We call it a benefit when a thing is fitted only to some particular want of ours. Thus to get is always to get partially, and it never can be otherwise. So this craving for acquisition belongs to our finite self.

But that side of our existence whose direction is towards the infinite seeks not wealth, but freedom and joy. There the reign of necessity ceases, and there our function is not to get but to be. To be what? To be one with Brahma. For the region of the infinite is the region of unity. Therefore the Upanishads say: *If man apprehends God he becomes true.* Here it is becoming, it is not having more. Words do no gather bulk when you know their meaning; they become true by being one with the idea.

Though the West has accepted as its teacher him who boldly proclaimed his oneness with his Father, and who exhorted his followers to be perfect as God, it has never been reconciled to this idea of our unity with the infinite being. It condemns, as a piece of blasphemy, any implication of man's becoming God. This is certainly not the idea that Christ preached, nor perhaps the idea of the Christian mystics, but this seems to be the idea that has become popular in the Christian west.

But the highest wisdom in the East holds that it is not the function of our soul to *gain* God, to utilise him for any special material purpose. All that we can ever aspire to is to become more and more one with God. In the region of nature, which is the region of diversity, we grow by acquisition; in the spiritual world, which is the region of unity, we grow by losing ourselves, by uniting. Gaining a thing, as we have said, is by its nature partial, it is limited only to a particular want; but *being* is complete, it belongs to our wholeness, it springs not from any necessity but from our affinity with the infinite, which is the principle of perfection that we have in our soul.

Yes, we must become Brahma. We must not shrink to avow this. Our existence is meaningless if we never can expect to realise the highest perfection that there is. If we have an aim and yet can never reach it, then it is no aim at all.

But can it then be said that there is no difference between Brahma and our individual soul? Of course the difference is obvious. Call it illusion or ignorance, or whatever name you may give it, it is there. You can offer explanations but you cannot explain it away. Even illusion is true an illusion.

Brahma is Brahma, he is the infinite ideal of perfection. But we are not what we truly are; we are ever to become true, ever to become Brahma. There is the eternal play of love in the relation between this being and the becoming; and in the depth of this mystery is the source of all truth and beauty that sustains the endless march of creation.

In the music of the rushing stream sounds the joyful assurance, “I shall become the sea.” It is not a vain assumption; it is true humility, for it is the truth. The river has no other alternative. On both sides of its banks it has numerous fields and forests, villages and towns; it can serve them in various ways, cleanse them and feed them, carry their produce from place to place. But it can have only partial relations with these, and however long it may linger among them it remains separate; it never can become a town or a forest.

But it can and does become the sea. The lesser moving water has its affinity with the great motionless water of the ocean. It moves through the thousand objects on its onward course, and its motion finds its finality when it

reaches the sea.

The river can become the sea, but she can never make the sea part and parcel of herself. If, by some chance, she has encircled some broad sheet of water and pretends that she has made the sea a part of herself, we at once know that it is not so, that her current is still seeking rest in the great ocean to which it can never set boundaries.

In the same manner, our soul can only become Brahma as the river can become the sea. Everything else she touches at one of her points, then leaves and moves on, but she never can leave Brahma and move beyond him. Once our soul realises her ultimate object of repose in Brahma, all her movements acquire a purpose. It is this ocean of infinite rest which gives significance to endless activities. It is this perfectness of being that lends to the imperfection of becoming that quality of beauty which finds its expression in all poetry, drama and art.

There must be a complete idea that animates a poem. Every sentence of the poem touches that idea. When the reader realises that pervading idea, as he reads on, then the reading of the poem is full of joy to him. Then every part of the poem becomes radiantly significant by the light of the whole. But if the poem goes on interminably, never expressing the idea of the whole, only throwing off disconnected images, however beautiful, it becomes wearisome and unprofitable in the extreme. The progress of our soul is like a perfect poem. It has an infinite idea which once realised makes all movements full of meaning and joy. But if we detach its movements from that ultimate idea, if we do not see the infinite rest and only see the infinite motion, then existence appears to us a monstrous evil, impetuously rushing towards an unending aimlessness.

I remember in our childhood we had a teacher who used to make us learn by heart the whole book of Sanskrit grammer, which is written in symbols, without explaining their meaning to us. Day after day we went toiling on, but on towards what, we had not the least notion. So, as regards our lessons, we were in the position of the pessimist who only counts the breathless activities of the world, but cannot see the infinite repose of the perfection whence these activities are gaining their equilibrium every moment in absolute fitness and harmony. We lose all joy in thus contemplating existence, because we miss the truth. We see the gesticulations of the dancer, and we imagine these are directed by a ruthless tyranny of chance, while we are deaf to the eternal music which makes every one of these gestures inevitably spontaneous and beautiful. These motions are ever growing into that music of perfection, becoming one with it, dedicating to that melody at every step the multitudinous forms they go on creating.

And this is the truth of our soul, and this is her joy, that she must ever be growing into Brahma, that all her movements should be modulated by this ultimate idea, and all her creations should be given as offerings to the supreme spirit of perfection.

There is a remarkable saying in the Upanishads: *I think not that I know him well, or that I know him, or even that I know him not.* [Footnote: Naham manye suvedeti no na vedeti vedacha.]

By the process of knowledge we can never know the infinite being. But if he is altogether beyond our reach, then he is absolutely nothing to us. The truth is that we know him not, yet we know him.

This has been explained in another saying of the Upanishads: *From Brahma words come back baffled, as well as the mind, but he who knows him by the joy of him is free from all fears.* [Footnote: Yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha anandam brahmano vidvan na vibheti kutacchana.]

Knowledge is partial, because our intellect is an instrument, it is only a part of us, it can give us information about things which can be divided and analysed, and whose properties can be classified part by part. But Brahma is perfect, and knowledge which is partial can never be a knowledge of him.

But he can be known by joy, by love. For joy is knowledge in its completeness, it is knowing by our whole being. Intellect sets us apart from the things to be known, but love knows its object by fusion. Such knowledge is immediate and admits no doubt. It is the same as knowing our own selves, only more so.

Therefore, as the Upanishads say, mind can never know Brahma, words can never describe him; he can only be known by our soul, by her joy in him, by her love. Or, in other words, we can only come into relation with him by union—union of our whole being. We must be one with our Father, we must be perfect as he is.

But how can that be? There can be no grade in infinite perfection. We cannot grow more and more into Brahma. He is the absolute one, and there can be no more or less in him.

Indeed, the realisation of the *paramatman*, the supreme soul, within our *antaratman*, our inner individual soul, is in a state of absolute completion. We cannot think of it as non− existent and depending on our limited powers for its gradual construction. If our relation with the divine were all a thing of our own making, how should we rely on it as true, and how should it lend us support?

Yes, we must know that within us we have that where space and time cease to rule and where the links of evolution are merged in unity. In that everlasting abode of the *ataman*, the soul, the revelation of the *paramatman*, the supreme soul, is already complete. Therefore the Upanishads say: *He who knows Brahman, the true, the all−conscious, and the infinite as hidden in the depths of the soul, which is the supreme sky (the inner sky of consciousness), enjoys all objects of desire in union with the all−knowing Brahman.* [Footnote: Satyam jnanam anantam brahma yo veda nihitam guhayam paramo vyoman so'cnute sarvan kaman saha brahmana vipaschite.]

The union is already accomplished. The *paramatman*, the supreme soul, has himself chosen this soul of ours as his bride and the marriage has been completed. The solemn *mantram* has been uttered: *Let thy heart be even as my heart is.* [Footnote: Yadetat hridayam mama tadastu hridayan tava.] There is no room in this marriage for evolution to act the part of the master of ceremonies. The *eshah*, who cannot otherwise be described than as *This*, the nameless immediate presence, is ever here in our innermost being. “This *eshah*, or *This*, is the supreme end of the other this”; [Footnote: Eshasya parama gatih] “this *This* is the supreme treasure of the other this”; [Footnote: Eshasya parama sampat.] “this *This* is the supreme dwelling of the other this”; [Footnote: Eshasya paramo lokah] “this *This* is the supreme joy of the other this.” [Footnote: Eshasya parama anandah] Because the marriage of supreme love has been accomplished in timeless time. And now goes on the endless *lila*, the play of love. He who has been gained in eternity is now being pursued in time and space, in joys and sorrows, in this world and in the worlds beyond. When the soul−bride understands this well, her heart is blissful and at rest. She knows that she, like a river, has attained the ocean of her fulfilment at one end of her being, and at the other end she is ever attaining it; at one end it is eternal rest and completion, at the other it is incessant movement and change. When she knows both ends as inseparably connected, then she knows the world as her own household by the right of knowing the master of the world as her own lord. Then all her services becomes services of love, all the troubles and tribulations of life come to her as trials triumphantly borne to prove the strength of her love, smilingly to win the wager from her lover. But so long as she remains obstinately in the dark, lifts not her veil, does not recognise her lover, and only knows the world dissociated from him, she serves as a handmaid here, where by right she might reign as a queen; she sways in doubt, and weeps in sorrow and dejection. *She passes from starvation to starvation, from trouble to trouble, and from fear to fear.* [Footnote: Daurbhikshat yati daurbhiksham klecat klecam bhayat bhayam.]

I can never forget that scrap of a song I once heard in the early dawn in the midst of the din of the crowd that had collected for a festival the night before: “Ferryman, take me across to the other shore!”

In the bustle of all our work there comes out this cry, “Take me across.” The carter in India sings while driving his cart, “Take me across.” The itinerant grocer deals out his goods to his customers and sings, “Take

me across”.

What is the meaning of this cry? We feel we have not reached our goal; and we know with all our striving and toiling we do not come to the end, we do not attain our object. Like a child dissatisfied with its dolls, our heart cries, “Not this, not this.” But what is that other? Where is the further shore?

Is it something else than what we have? Is it somewhere else than where we are? Is it to take rest from all our works, to be relieved from all the responsibilities of life?

No, in the very heart of our activities we are seeking for our end. We are crying for the across, even where we stand. So, while our lips utter their prayer to be carried away, our busy hands are never idle.

In truth, thou ocean of joy, this shore and the other shore are one and the same in thee. When I call this my own, the other lies estranged; and missing the sense of that completeness which is in me, my heart incessantly cries out for the other. All my this, and that other, are waiting to be completely reconciled in thy love.

This “I” of mine toils hard, day and night, for a home which it knows as its own. Alas, there will be no end of its sufferings so long as it is not able to call this home thine. Till then it will struggle on, and its heart will ever cry, “Ferryman, lead me across.” When this home of mine is made thine, that very moment is it taken across, even while its old walls enclose it. This “I” is restless. It is working for a gain which can never be assimilated with its spirit, which it never can hold and retain. In its efforts to clasp in its own arms that which is for all, it hurts others and is hurt in its turn, and cries, “Lead me across”. But as soon as it is able to say, “All my work is thine,” everything remains the same, only it is taken across.

Where can I meet thee unless in this mine home made thine? Where can I join thee unless in this my work transformed into thy work? If I leave my home I shall not reach thy home; if I cease my work I can never join thee in thy work. For thou dwellest in me and I in thee. Thou without me or I without thee are nothing.

Therefore, in the midst of our home and our work, the prayer rises, “Lead me across!” For here rolls the sea, and even here lies the other shore waiting to be reached—yes, here is this everlasting present, not distant, not anywhere else.

I

THE RELATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE UNIVERSE

The civilisation of ancient Greece was nurtured within city walls. In fact, all the modern civilisations have their cradles of brick and mortar.

These walls leave their mark deep in the minds of men. They set up a principle of "divide and rule" in our mental outlook, which begets in us a habit of securing all our conquests by fortifying them and separating them from one another. We divide nation and nation, knowledge and knowledge, man and nature. It breeds in us a strong suspicion of whatever is beyond the barriers we have built, and everything has to fight hard for its entrance into our recognition.

When the first Aryan invaders appeared in India it was a vast land of forests, and the new-comers rapidly took advantage of them. These forests afforded them shelter from the fierce heat of the sun and the ravages of tropical storms, pastures for cattle, fuel for sacrificial fire, and materials for building cottages. And the different Aryan clans with their patriarchal heads settled in the different forest tracts which had some special advantage of natural protection, and food and water in plenty.

Thus in India it was in the forests that our civilisation had its birth, and it took a distinct character from this origin and environment. It was surrounded by the vast life of nature, was fed and clothed by her, and had the closest and most constant intercourse with her varying aspects.

Such a life, it may be thought, tends to have the effect of dulling human intelligence and dwarfing the incentives to progress by lowering the standards of existence. But in ancient India we find that the circumstances of forest life did not overcome man's mind, and did not enfeeble the current of his energies, but only gave to it a particular direction. Having been in constant contact with the living growth of nature, his mind was free from the desire to extend his dominion by erecting boundary walls around his acquisitions. His aim was not to acquire but to realise, to enlarge his consciousness by growing with and growing into his surroundings. He felt that truth is all-comprehensive, that there is no such thing as absolute isolation in existence, and the only way of attaining truth is through the interpenetration of our being into all objects. To realise this great harmony between man's spirit and the spirit of the world was the endeavour of the forest-dwelling sages of ancient India.

In later days there came a time when these primeval forests gave way to cultivated fields, and wealthy cities sprang up on all sides. Mighty kingdoms

were established, which had communications with all the great powers of the world. But even in the heyday of its material prosperity the heart of India ever looked back with adoration upon the early ideal of strenuous self-realisation, and the dignity of the simple life of the forest hermitage, and drew its best inspiration from the wisdom stored there.

The west seems to take a pride in thinking that it is subduing nature; as if we are living in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything we want from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things. This sentiment is the product of the city-wall habit and training of mind. For in the city life man naturally directs the concentrated light of his mental vision upon his own life and works, and this creates an artificial dissociation between himself and the Universal Nature within whose bosom he lies.

But in India the point of view was different; it included the world with the man as one great truth. India put all her emphasis on the harmony that exists between the individual and the universal. She felt we could have no communication whatever with our surroundings if they were absolutely foreign to us. Man's complaint against nature is that he has to acquire most of his necessaries by his own efforts. Yes, but his efforts are not in vain; he is reaping success every day, and that shows there is a rational connection between him and nature, for we never can make anything our own except that which is truly related to us.

We can look upon a road from two different points of view. One regards it as dividing us from the object of our desire; in that case we count every step of our journey over it as something attained by force in the face of obstruction. The other sees it as the road which leads us to our destination; and as such it is part of our goal. It is already the beginning of our attainment, and by journeying over it we can only gain that which in itself it offers to us. This last point of view is that of India with regard to nature. For her, the great fact is that we are in harmony with nature; that man can think because his thoughts are in harmony with things; that he can use the forces of nature for his own purpose only because his power is in harmony with the power which is universal, and that in the long run his purpose never can knock against the purpose which works through nature.

In the west the prevalent feeling is that nature belongs exclusively to inanimate things and to beasts, that there is a sudden unaccountable break where human-nature begins. According to it, everything that is low in the scale of beings is merely nature, and whatever has the stamp of perfection on it, intellectual or moral, is human-nature. It is like dividing the bud and the blossom into two separate categories, and putting their grace to the credit of two different and antithetical principles. But the Indian mind never has any hesitation in acknowledging its kinship with nature, its unbroken relation with all.

The fundamental unity of creation was not simply a philosophical speculation for India; it was her life-object to realise this great harmony in feeling and in action. With mediation and service, with a regulation of life, she cultivated her consciousness in such a way that everything had a spiritual meaning to her. The earth, water and light, fruits and flowers, to her were not merely physical phenomena to be turned to use and then left aside. They were necessary to her in the attainment of her ideal of perfection, as every note is necessary to the completeness of the symphony. India intuitively felt that the essential fact of this world has a vital meaning for us; we have to be fully alive to it and establish a conscious relation with it, not merely impelled by scientific curiosity or greed of material advantage, but realising it in the spirit of sympathy, with a large feeling of joy and peace.

The man of science knows, in one aspect, that the world is not merely what it appears to be to our senses; he knows that earth and water are really the play of forces that manifest themselves to us as earth and water--how, we can but partially apprehend. Likewise the man who has his spiritual eyes open knows that the ultimate truth about earth and water lies in our apprehension of the eternal will which works in time and takes shape in the forces we realise under those aspects. This is not mere knowledge, as science is, but it is a preception of the soul by the soul. This does not lead us to power, as knowledge does, but it gives us joy, which is the product of the union of kindred things. The man whose acquaintance with the world does not lead him deeper than science leads him, will never understand what it is that the man with the spiritual vision finds in these natural phenomena. The water does not merely cleanse his limbs, but it purifies his heart; for it touches his soul. The earth does not merely hold his body, but it gladdens his mind; for its contact is more than a physical contact--it is a living presence. When a man does not realise his kinship with the world, he lives in a prison-house whose walls are alien to him. When he meets the eternal spirit in all objects, then is he emancipated, for then he discovers the fullest significance of the world into which he is born; then he finds himself in perfect truth, and his harmony with the all is established. In India men are enjoined to be fully awake to the fact that they are in the closest relation to things around them, body and soul, and that they are to hail the morning sun, the flowing water, the fruitful earth, as the manifestation of the same living truth which holds them in its embrace. Thus the text of our everyday meditation is the *Gayathri*, a verse which is considered to be the epitome of all the Vedas. By its help we try to realise the essential unity of the world with the conscious soul of man; we learn to perceive the unity held together by the one Eternal Spirit, whose power creates the earth, the sky, and the stars, and at the same time irradiates our minds with the light of a consciousness that moves and exists in unbroken continuity with the outer world.

It is not true that India has tried to ignore differences of value in different things, for she knows that would make life impossible. The sense of the superiority of man in the scale of creation has not been absent from her mind. But she has had her own idea as to that in which his superiority really consists. It is not in the power of possession but in the power of union. Therefore India chose her places of pilgrimage wherever there was in nature some special grandeur or beauty, so that her mind could come out of its world of narrow necessities and realise its place in the infinite. This was the reason why in India a whole people who once were meat-eaters gave up taking animal food to cultivate the sentiment of universal sympathy for life, an event unique in the history of mankind.

India knew that when by physical and mental barriers we violently detach ourselves from the inexhaustible life of nature; when we become merely man, but not man-in-the-universe, we create bewildering problems, and having shut off the source of their solution, we try all kinds of artificial methods each of which brings its own crop of interminable difficulties. When man leaves his resting-place in universal nature, when he walks on the single rope of humanity, it means either a dance or a fall for him, he has ceaselessly to strain every nerve and muscle to keep his balance at each step, and then, in the intervals of his weariness, he fulminates against Providence and feels a secret pride and satisfaction in thinking that he has been unfairly dealt with by the whole scheme of things.

But this cannot go on for ever. Man must realise the wholeness of his existence, his place in the infinite; he must know that hard as he may strive he can never create his honey within the cells of his hive; for the perennial supply of his life food is outside their walls. He must know that when man shuts himself out from the vitalising and purifying touch of the infinite, and falls back upon himself for his sustenance and his healing, then he goads himself into madness, tears himself into shreds, and eats his own substance. Deprived of the background of the whole, his poverty loses its one great quality, which is simplicity, and becomes squalid and shamefaced. His wealth is no longer magnanimous; it grows merely extravagant. His appetites do not minister to his life, keeping to the limits of their purpose; they become an end in themselves and set fire to his life and play the fiddle in the lurid light of the conflagration. Then it is that in our self-expression we try to startle and not to attract; in art we strive for originality and lose sight of truth which is old and yet ever new; in literature we miss the complete view of man which is simple and yet great, but he appears as a psychological problem or the embodiment of a passion that is intense because abnormal and because exhibited in the glare of a fiercely emphatic light which is artificial. When man's consciousness is restricted only to the immediate vicinity of his human self, the deeper roots of his nature do not find their permanent soil, his spirit is ever on the brink of starvation, and in the place of healthful strength he substitutes rounds of

stimulation. Then it is that man misses his inner perspective and measures his greatness by its bulk and not by its vital link with the infinite, judges his activity by its movement and not by the repose of perfection--the repose which is in the starry heavens, in the ever-flowing rhythmic dance of creation.

The first invasion of India has its exact parallel in the invasion of America by the European settlers. They also were confronted with primeval forests and a fierce struggle with aboriginal races. But this struggle between man and man, and man and nature lasted till the very end; they never came to any terms. In India the forests which were the habitation of the barbarians became the sanctuary of sages, but in America these great living cathedrals of nature had no deeper significance to man. The brought wealth and power to him, and perhaps at times they ministered to his enjoyment of beauty, and inspired a solitary poet. They never acquired a sacred association in the hearts of men as the site of some great spiritual reconcilement where man's soul has its meeting-place with the soul of the world.

I do not for a moment wish to suggest that these things should have been otherwise. It would be an utter waste of opportunities if history were to repeat itself exactly in the same manner in every place. It is best for the commerce of the spirit that people differently situated should bring their different products into the market of humanity, each of which is complementary and necessary to the others. All that I wish to say is that India at the outset of her career met with a special combination of circumstances which was not lost upon her. She had, according to her opportunities, thought and pondered, striven and suffered, dived into the depths of existence, and achieved something which surely cannot be without its value to people whose evolution in history took a different way altogether. Man for his perfect growth requires all the living elements that constitute his complex life; that is why his food has to be cultivated in different fields and brought from different sources.

Civilisation is a kind of mould that each nation is busy making for itself to shape its men and women according to its best ideal. All its institutions, its legislature, its standard of approbation and condemnation, its conscious and unconscious teachings tend toward that object. The modern civilisation of the west, by all its organised efforts, is trying to turn out men perfect in physical, intellectual, and moral efficiency. There the vast energies of the nations are employed in extending man's power over his surroundings, and people are combining and straining every faculty to possess and to turn to account all that they can lay their hands upon, to overcome every obstacle on their path of conquest. They are ever disciplining themselves to fight nature and other races; their armaments are getting more and more stupendous every day; their machines, their appliances, their organisations go on multiplying at an amazing rate. This is a splendid achievement, no doubt, and a wonderful manifestation of man's masterfulness which knows no obstacle, and which has for its object the supremacy of himself over everything else.

The ancient civilisation of India had its own ideal of perfection towards which its efforts were directed. Its aim was not attaining power, and it neglected to cultivate to the utmost its capacities, and to organise men for defensive and offensive purposes, for co-operation in the acquisition of wealth and for military and political ascendancy. The ideal that India tried to realise led her best men to the isolation of a contemplative life, and the treasures that she gained for mankind by penetrating into the mysteries of reality cost her dear in the sphere of worldly success. Yet, this also was a sublime achievement,--it was a supreme manifestation of that human aspiration which knows no limit, and which has for its object nothing less than the realisation of the Infinite.

There were the virtuous, the wise, the courageous; there were the statesmen, kings and emperors of India; but whom amongst all these classes did she look up to and choose to be the representative of men?

They were the rishis. What were the rishis? *They who having attained the supreme soul in knowledge were filled with wisdom, and having found him in union with the soul were in perfect harmony with the inner self; they having realised him in the heart were free from all selfish desires, and having experienced him in all the activities of the world, had attained calmness. The rishis were they who having reached the supreme God from all sides had found abiding peace, had become united with all, had entered into the life of the Universe.* 1

Thus the state of realising our relationship with all, of entering into everything through union with God, was considered in India to be the ultimate end and fulfilment of humanity.

Man can destroy and plunder, earn and accumulate, invent and discover, but he is great because his soul comprehends all. It is dire destruction for him when he envelopes his soul in a dead shell of callous habits, and when a blind fury of works whirls round him like an eddying dust storm, shutting out the horizon. That indeed kills the very spirit of his being, which is the spirit of comprehension. Essentially man is not a slave either of himself or of the world; but he is a lover. His freedom and fulfilment is in love, which is another name for perfect comprehension. By this power of comprehension, this permeation of his being, he is united with the all-pervading Spirit, who is also the breath of his soul. Where a man tries to raise himself to eminence by pushing and jostling all others, to achieve a distinction by which he prides himself to be more than everybody else, there he is alienated from that Spirit. This is why the Upanishads describe those who have attained the goal of human life as "*peaceful*" 2 and as "*at-one-with- God*," 3 meaning that they are in perfect harmony with man and nature, and therefore in undisturbed union with God.

We have a glimpse of the same truth in the teachings of Jesus when he says, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man

to enter the kingdom of Heaven"-- which implies that whatever we treasure for ourselves separates us from others; our possessions are our limitations. He who is bent upon accumulating riches is unable, with his ego continually bulging, to pass through the gates of comprehension of the spiritual world, which is the world of perfect harmony; he is shut up within the narrow walls of his limited acquisitions.

Hence the spirit of the teachings of Upanishad is: In order to find him you must embrace all. In the pursuit of wealth you really give up everything to gain a few things, and that is not the way to attain him who is completeness.

Some modern philosophers of Europe, who are directly or indirectly indebted to the Upanishads, far from realising their debt, maintain that the Brahma of India is a mere abstraction, a negation of all that is in the world. In a word, that the Infinite Being is to be found nowhere except in metaphysics. It may be, that such a doctrine has been and still is prevalent with a section of our countrymen. But this is certainly not in accord with the pervading spirit of the Indian mind. Instead, it is the practice of realising and affirming the presence of the infinite in all things which has been its constant inspiration.

We are enjoined to see *whatever there is in the world as being enveloped by God.* [4]

***I bow to God over and over again who is in fire and in water, who permeates the whole world, who is in the annual crops as well as in the perennial trees.* [5]**

Can this be God abstracted from the world? Instead, it signifies not merely seeing him in all things, but saluting him in all the objects of the world. The attitude of the God-conscious man of the Upanishad towards the universe is one of a deep feeling of adoration. His object of worship is present everywhere. It is the one living truth that makes all realities true. This truth is not only of knowledge but of devotion. '*Namonamah*,'--we bow to him everywhere, and over and over again. It is recognised in the outburst of the Rishi, who addresses the whole world in a sudden ecstasy of joy: *Listen to me, ye sons of the immortal spirit, ye who live in the heavenly abode, I have known the Supreme Person whose light shines forth from beyond the darkness.* [6] Do we not find the overwhelming delight of a direct and positive experience where there is not the least trace of vagueness or passivity?

Buddha who developed the practical side of the teaching of Upanishads, preached the same message when he said, *With everything, whether it is above or below, remote or near, visible or invisible, thou shalt preserve a relation of unlimited love without any animosity or without a desire to kill. To live in such a consciousness while standing or walking, sitting or lying down till you are asleep, is Brahma vihāra, or, in other words, is living and moving and having your joy in the spirit of Brahma.*

What is that spirit? The Upanishad says, *The being who is in his essence the light and life of all, who is world-conscious, is Brahma.* 7 To feel all, to be conscious of everything, is his spirit. We are immersed in his consciousness body and soul. It is through his consciousness that the sun attracts the earth; it is through his consciousness that the light-waves are being transmitted from planet to planet.

Not only in space, but *this light and life, this all-feeling being is in our souls.* 8 He is all-conscious in space, or the world of extension; and he is all-conscious in soul, or the world of intension.

Thus to attain our world-consciousness, we have to unite our feeling with this all-pervasive infinite feeling. In fact, the only true human progress is coincident with this widening of the range of feeling. All our poetry, philosophy, science, art and religion are serving to extend the scope of our consciousness towards higher and larger spheres. Man does not acquire rights through occupation of larger space, nor through external conduct, but his rights extend only so far as he is real, and his reality is measured by the scope of his consciousness.

We have, however, to pay a price for this attainment of the freedom of consciousness. What is the price? It is to give one's self away. Our soul can realise itself truly only by denying itself. The Upanishad says, *Thou shalt gain by giving away* 9 , *Thou shalt not covet.* 10

In Gita we are advised to work disinterestedly, abandoning all lust for the result. Many outsiders conclude from this teaching that the conception of the world as something unreal lies at the root of the so-called disinterestedness preached in India. But the reverse is true.

The man who aims at his own aggrandisement underrates everything else. Compared to his ego the rest of the world is unreal. Thus in order to be fully conscious of the reality of all, one has to be free himself from the bonds of personal desires. This discipline we have to go through to prepare ourselves for our social duties--for sharing the burdens of our fellow-beings. Every endeavour to attain a larger life requires of man "to gain by giving away, and not to be greedy." And thus to expand gradually the consciousness of one's unity with all is the striving of humanity.

The Infinite in India was not a thin nonentity, void of all content. The Rishis of India asserted emphatically, "To know him in this life is to be true; not to know him in this life is the desolation of death." 11 How to know him then? "By realising him in each and all." 12 Not only in nature but in the family, in society, and in the state, the more we realise the World- conscious in all, the better for us. Failing to realise it, we turn our faces to destruction.

It fills me with great joy and a high hope for the future of humanity when I realise that there was a time in the remote past when our poet-prophets stood under the lavish sunshine of an Indian sky and greeted the world with the glad recognition of kindred. It was not an anthropomorphic hallucination. It was not seeing man reflected everywhere in grotesquely exaggerated images, and witnessing the human drama acted on a gigantic scale in nature's arena of flitting lights and shadows. On the contrary, it meant crossing the limiting barriers of the individual, to become more than man, to become one with the All. It was not a mere play of the imagination, but it was the liberation of consciousness from all the mystifications and exaggerations of the self. These ancient seers felt in the serene depth of their mind that the same energy which vibrates and passes into the endless forms of the world manifests itself in our inner being as consciousness; and there is no break in unity. For these seers there was no gap in their luminous vision of perfection. They never acknowledged even death itself as creating a chasm in the field of reality. They said, *His reflection is death as well as immortality.* 13 They did not recognise any essential opposition between life and death, and they said with absolute assurance, "It is life that is death." 14 They saluted with the same serenity of gladness "life in its aspect of appearing and in its aspect of departure"-- *That which is past is hidden in life, and that which is to come.* 15 They knew that mere appearance and disappearance are on the surface like waves on the sea, but life which is permanent knows no decay or diminution.

Everything has sprung from immortal life and is vibrating with life, 16 *for life is immense.* 17

This is the noble heritage from our forefathers waiting to be claimed by us as our own, this ideal of the supreme freedom of consciousness. It is not merely intellectual or emotional, it has an ethical basis, and it must be translated into action. In the Upanishad it is said, *The supreme being is all-pervading, therefore he is the innate good in all.* 18 To be truly united in knowledge, love, and service with all beings, and thus to realise one's self in the all-pervading God is the essence of goodness, and this is the keynote of the teachings of the Upanishads: *Life is immense!* 19

Footnotes

1

> Samprāpyainam rishayo jñānatripatāh
> Kritātmānō vītarāgāh praçantāh
> tē sarvagam sarvatah prāpya dhīrāh
> Yuktātmānah sarvamēvāviçanti.

2 Praçantāh

3 Yuktātmānah

4 Içāvāsyamidam sarvam yat kiñcha jagatyāñ jagat.

5 Yo dēvō'gnau y'ōpsu y'ō viçvambhuvanamāvivēça ya ōshadhishu yō vanaspatishu tasmai dēvāya namōnamah.

6 Çrinvantu viçve amritasya putrā ā ye divya dhāmāni tasthuh vedāhametam purusham mahāntam āditya varņam tamasah parastāt.

7 Yaçchāyamasminnākāçē tējōmayō'mritamayah purushah sarvānubhūh.

8 Yaçchāyamasminnātmani tējōmayō'mritamayah purushah sarvānubhūh.

9 Tyaktēna bhuñjīthāh

10 Mā gridhah

11 Iha chēt avēdit atha satyamasti, nachēt iha avēdit mahatī vinashtih.

12 Bhūtēshu bhūtēshu vichintva.

13 Yasya chhāyāmritam yasya mrityuh.

14 Prāno mrityuh.

15 Namō astu āyatē namō astu parāyatē. Prānē ha bhūtam bhavyañcha.

16 Yadidan kiñcha praņa ejati nihsritam.

17 Prāno virāt.

18 Sarvavyāpī sa bhagavān tasmāt sarvagatah çivah.

19 Prāņo virāt.

II

SOUL CONSCIOUSNESS

We have seen that it was the aspiration of ancient India to live and move and have its joy in Brahma, the all-conscious and all- pervading Spirit, by extending its field of consciousness over all the world. But that, it may be

urged, is an impossible task for man to achieve. If this extension of consciousness be an outward process, then it is endless; it is like attempting to cross the ocean after ladling out its water. By beginning to try to realise all, one has to end by realising nothing.

But, in reality, it is not so absurd as it sounds. Man has every day to solve this problem of enlarging his region and adjusting his burdens. His burdens are many, too numerous for him to carry, but he knows that by adopting a system he can lighten the weight of his load. Whenever they feel too complicated and unwieldy, he knows it is because he has not been able to hit upon the system which would have set everything in place and distributed the weight evenly. This search for system is really a search for unity, for synthesis; it is our attempt to harmonise the heterogeneous complexity of outward materials by an inner adjustment. In the search we gradually become aware that to find out the One is to possess the All; that there, indeed, is our last and highest privilege. It is based on the law of that unity which is, if we only know it, our abiding strength. Its living principle is the power that is in truth; the truth of that unity which comprehends multiplicity. Facts are many, but the truth is one. The animal intelligence knows facts, the human mind has power to apprehend truth. The apple falls from the tree, the rain descends upon the earth--you can go on burdening your memory with such facts and never come to an end. But once you get hold of the law of gravitation you can dispense with the necessity of collecting facts *ad infinitum*. You have got at one truth which governs numberless facts. This discovery of truth is pure joy to man--it is a liberation of his mind. For, a mere fact is like a blind lane, it leads only to itself--it has no beyond. But a truth opens up a whole horizon, it leads us to the infinite. That is the reason why, when a man like Darwin discovers some simple general truth about Biology, it does not stop there, but like a lamp shedding its light far beyond the object for which it was lighted, it illumines the whole region of human life and thought, transcending its original purpose. Thus we find that truth, while investing all facts, is not a mere aggregate of facts--it surpasses them on all sides and points to the infinite reality.

As in the region of knowledge so in that of consciousness, man must clearly realise some central truth which will give him an outlook over the widest possible field. And that is the object which the Upanishad has in view when it says, *Know thine own Soul.* Or, in other words, realise the one great principal of unity that there is in every man.

All our egoistic impulses, our selfish desires, obscure our true vision of the soul. For they only indicate our own narrow self. When we are conscious of our soul, we perceive the inner being that transcends our ego and has its deeper affinity with the All.

Children, when they begin to learn each separate letter of the alphabet, find no pleasure in it, because they miss the real purpose of the lesson; in fact, while

letters claim our attention only in themselves and as isolated things, they fatigue us. They become a source of joy to us only when they combine into words and sentences and convey an idea.

Likewise, our soul when detached and imprisoned within the narrow limits of a self loses its significance. For its very essence is unity. It can only find out its truth by unifying itself with others, and only then it has its joy. Man was troubled and he lived in a state of fear so long as he had not discovered the uniformity of law in nature; till then the world was alien to him. The law that he discovered is nothing but the perception of harmony that prevails between reason which is of the soul of man and the workings of the world. This is the bond of union through which man is related to the world in which he lives, and he feels an exceeding joy when he finds this out, for then he realises himself in his surroundings. To understand anything is to find in it something which is our own, and it is the discovery of ourselves outside us which makes us glad. This relation of understanding is partial, but the relation of love is complete. In love the sense of difference is obliterated and the human soul fulfils its purpose in perfection, transcending the limits of itself and reaching across the threshold of the infinite. Therefore love is the highest bliss that man can attain to, for through it alone he truly knows that he is more than himself, and that he is at one with the All.

This principal of unity which man has in his soul is ever active, establishing relations far and wide through literature, art, and science, society, statecraft, and religion. Our great Revealers are they who make manifest the true meaning of the soul by giving up self for the love of mankind. They face calumny and persecution, deprivation and death in their service of love. They live the life of the soul, not of the self, and thus they prove to us the ultimate truth of humanity. We call them *Mahātmās,* "the men of the great soul."

It is said in one of the Upanishads: *It is not that thou lovest thy son because thou desirest him, but thou lovest thy son because thou desirest thine own soul.* [20] The meaning of this is, that whomsoever we love, in him we find our own soul in the highest sense. The final truth of our existence lies in this. *Paramātmā*, the supreme soul, is in me, as well as in my son, and my joy in my son is the realisation of this truth. It has become quite a commonplace fact, yet it is wonderful to think upon, that the joys and sorrows of our loved ones are joys and sorrows to us--nay they are more. Why so? Because in them we have grown larger, in them we have touched that great truth which comprehends the whole universe.

It very often happens that our love for our children, our friends, or other loved ones, debars us from the further realisation of our soul. It enlarges our scope of consciousness, no doubt, yet it sets a limit to its freest expansion. Nevertheless, it is the first step, and all the wonder lies in this first step itself. It shows to us the true nature of our soul. From it we know, for certain, that our

highest joy is in the losing of our egoistic self and in the uniting with others. This love gives us a new power and insight and beauty of mind to the extent of the limits we set around it, but ceases to do so if those limits lose their elasticity, and militate against the spirit of love altogether; then our friendships become exclusive, our families selfish and inhospitable, our nations insular and aggressively inimical to other races. It is like putting a burning light within a sealed enclosure, which shines brightly till the poisonous gases accumulate and smother the flame. Nevertheless it has proved its truth before it dies, and made known the joy of freedom from the grip of darkness, blind and empty and cold.

According to the Upanishads, the key to cosmic consciousness, to God-consciousness, is in the consciousness of the soul. To know our soul apart from the self is the first step towards the realisation of the supreme deliverance. We must know with absolute certainty that essentially we are spirit. This we can do by winning mastery over self, by rising above all pride and greed and fear, by knowing that worldly losses and physical death can take nothing away from the truth and the greatness of our soul. The chick knows when it breaks through the self-centered isolation of its egg that the hard shell which covered it so long was not really a part of its life. That shell is a dead thing, it has no growth, it affords no glimpse whatever of the vast beyond that lies outside it. However pleasantly perfect and rounded it may be, it must be given a blow to, it must be burst through and thereby the freedom of light and air be won, and the complete purpose of bird life be achieved. In Sanskrit, the bird has been called the twice-born. So too the man who has gone through the ceremony of the discipline of self-restraint and high thinking for a period of at least twelve years; who has come out simple in wants, pure in heart, and ready to take up all the responsibilities of life in a disinterested largeness of spirit. He is considered to have had his rebirth from the blind envelopment of self to the freedom of soul life; to have come into living relation with his surroundings; to have become at one with the All.

I have already warned my hearers, and must once more warn them against the idea that the teachers of India preached a renunciation of the world and of self which leads only to the blank emptiness of negation. Their aim was the realisation of the soul, or, in other words, gaining the world in perfect truth. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," he meant this. He proclaimed the truth that when man gets rid of his pride of self then he comes into his true inheritance. No more has he to fight his way into his position in the world; it is secure for him everywhere by the immortal right of his soul. Pride of self interferes with the proper function of the soul which is to realise itself by perfecting its union with the world and the world's God.

In his sermon to Sádhu Simha Buddha says, *It is true, Simha, that I denounce activities, but only the activities that lead to the evil in words, thoughts, or deeds. It is true, Simha, that I preach extinction, but only the extinction of*

pride, lust, evil thought, and ignorance, not that of forgiveness, love, charity, and truth.

The doctrine of deliverance that Buddha preached was the freedom from the thraldom of *Avidyā*. *Avidyā* is the ignorance that darkens our consciousness, and tends to limit it within the boundaries of our personal self. It is this *Avidyā*, this ignorance, this limiting of consciousness that creates the hard separateness of the ego, and thus becomes the source of all pride and greed and cruelty incidental to self-seeking. When a man sleeps he is shut up within the narrow activities of his physical life. He lives, but he knows not the varied relations of his life to his surroundings,--therefore he knows not himself. So when a man lives the life of *Avidyā* he is confined within his self. It is a spiritual sleep; his consciousness is not fully awake to the highest reality that surrounds him, therefore he knows not the reality of his own soul. When he attains *Bodhi*, i.e. the awakenment from the sleep of self to the perfection of consciousness, he becomes Buddha.

Once I met two ascetics of a certain religious sect in a village of Bengal. "Can you tell me," I asked them, "wherein lies the special features of your religion?" One of them hesitated for a moment and answered, "It is difficult to define that." The other said, "No, it is quite simple. We hold that we have first of all to know our own soul under the guidance of our spiritual teacher, and when we have done that we can find him, who is the Supreme Soul, within us." "Why don't you preach your doctrine to all the people of the world?" I asked. "Whoever feels thirsty will of himself come to the river," was his reply. "But then, do you find it so? Are they coming?" The man gave a gentle smile, and with an assurance which had not the least tinge of impatience or anxiety, he said, "They must come, one and all."

Yes, he is right, this simple ascetic of rural Bengal. Man is indeed abroad to satisfy needs which are more to him than food and clothing. He is out to find himself. Man's history is the history of his journey to the unknown in quest of the realisation of his immortal self--his soul. Through the rise and fall of empires; through the building up gigantic piles of wealth and the ruthless scattering of them upon the dust; through the creation of vast bodies of symbols that give shape to his dreams and aspirations, and the casting of them away like the playthings of an outworn infancy; through his forging of magic keys with which to unlock the mysteries of creation, and through his throwing away of this labour of ages to go back to his workshop and work up afresh some new form; yes, through it all man is marching from epoch to epoch towards the fullest realisation of his soul,--the soul which is greater than the things man accumulates, the deeds he accomplishes, the theories he builds; the soul whose onward course is never checked by death or dissolution. Man's mistakes and failures have by no means been trifling or small, they have strewn his path with colossal ruins; his sufferings have been immense, like birth-pangs for a giant child; they are the prelude of a fulfilment whose scope is

infinite. Man has gone through and is still undergoing martyrdoms in various ways, and his institutions are the altars he has built whereto he brings his daily sacrifices, marvellous in kind and stupendous in quantity. All this would be absolutely unmeaning and unbearable if all along he did not feel that deepest joy of the soul within him, which tries its divine strength by suffering and proves its exhaustless riches by renunciation. Yes, they are coming, the pilgrims, one and all--coming to their true inheritance of the world; they are ever broadening their consciousness, ever seeking a higher and higher unity, ever approaching nearer to the one central Truth which is all-comprehensive.

Man's poverty is abysmal, his wants are endless till he becomes truly conscious of his soul. Till then, the world to him is in a state of continual flux-- a phantasm that is and is not. For a man who has realised his soul there is a determinate centre of the universe around which all else can find its proper place, and from thence only can he draw and enjoy the blessedness of a harmonious life.

There was a time when the earth was only a nebulous mass whose particles were scattered far apart through the expanding force of heat; when she had not yet attained her definiteness of form and had neither beauty nor purpose, but only heat and motion. Gradually, when her vapours were condensed into a unified rounded whole through a force that strove to bring all straggling matters under the control of a centre, she occupied her proper place among the planets of the solar system, like an emerald pendant in a necklace of diamonds. So with our soul. When the heat and motion of blind impulses and passions distract it on all sides, we can neither give nor receive anything truly. But when we find our centre in our soul by the power of self-restraint, by the force that harmonises all warring elements and unifies those that are apart, then all our isolated impressions reduce themselves to wisdom, and all our momentary impulses of heart find their completion in love; then all the petty details of our life reveal an infinite purpose, and all our thoughts and deeds unite themselves inseparably in an internal harmony.

The Upanishads say with great emphasis, *Know thou the One, the Soul.* [21] *It is the bridge leading to the immortal being.* [22]

This is the ultimate end of man, to find the *One* which is in him; which is his truth, which is his soul; the key with which he opens the gate of the spiritual life, the heavenly kingdom. His desires are many, and madly they run after the varied objects of the world, for therein they have their life and fulfilment. But that which is *one* in him is ever seeking for unity--unity in knowledge, unity in love, unity in purposes of will; its highest joy is when it reaches the infinite one within its eternal unity. Hence the saying of the Upanishad, *Only those of tranquil minds, and none else, can attain abiding joy, by realising within their souls the Being who manifests one essence in a multiplicity of forms.* [23]

[Transcriber's note: The above footnote contains the * mark in the original printed version. This has been retained as is.]

Through all the diversities of the world the one in us is threading its course towards the one in all; this is its nature and this is its joy. But by that devious path it could never reach its goal if it had not a light of its own by which it could catch the sight of what it was seeking in a flash. The vision of the Supreme One in our own soul is a direct and immediate intuition, not based on any ratiocination or demonstration at all. Our eyes naturally see an object as a whole, not by breaking it up into parts, but by bringing all the parts together into a unity with ourselves. So with the intuition of our Soul- consciousness, which naturally and totally realises its unity in the Supreme One.

Says the Upanishad: *This deity who is manifesting himself in the activities of the universe always dwells in the heart of man as the supreme soul. Those who realise him through the immediate perception of the heart attain immortality.* 24

He is *Vishvakarma*; that is, in a multiplicity of forms and forces lies his outward manifestation in nature; but his inner manifestation in our soul is that which exists in unity. Our pursuit of truth in the domain of nature therefore is through analysis and the gradual methods of science, but our apprehension of truth in our soul is immediate and through direct intuition. We cannot attain the supreme soul by successive additions of knowledge acquired bit by bit even through all eternity, because he is one, he is not made up of parts; we can only know him as heart of our hearts and soul of our soul; we can only know him in the love and joy we feel when we give up our self and stand before him face to face.

The deepest and the most earnest prayer that has ever risen from the human heart has been uttered in our ancient tongue: *O thou self-revealing one, reveal thyself in me.* 25 We are in misery because we are creatures of self--the self that is unyielding and narrow, that reflects no light, that is blind to the infinite. Our self is loud with its own discordant clamour--it is not the tuned harp whose chords vibrate with the music of the eternal. Sighs of discontent and weariness of failure, idle regrets for the past and anxieties for the future are troubling our shallow hearts because we have not found our souls, and the self-revealing spirit has not been manifest within us. Hence our cry, *O thou awful one, save me with thy smile of grace ever and evermore.* 26 It is a stifling shroud of death, this self-gratification, this insatiable greed, this pride of possession, this insolent alienation of heart. *Rudra, O thou awful one, rend this dark cover in twain and let the saving beam of thy smile of grace strike through this night of gloom and waken my soul.*

From unreality lead me to the real, from darkness to the light, from death to immortality. 27 But how can one hope to have this prayer granted? For infinite

is the distance that lies between truth and untruth, between death and deathlessness. Yet this measureless gulf is bridged in a moment when the self revealing one reveals himself in the soul. There the miracle happens, for there is the meeting-ground of the finite and infinite. *Father, completely sweep away all my sins!* 28 For in sin man takes part with the finite against the infinite that is in him. It is the defeat of his soul by his self. It is a perilously losing game, in which man stakes his all to gain a part. Sin is the blurring of truth which clouds the purity of our consciousness. In sin we lust after pleasures, not because they are truly desirable, but because the red light of our passions makes them appear desirable; we long for things not because they are great in themselves, but because our greed exaggerates them and makes them appear great. These exaggerations, these falsifications of the perspective of things, break the harmony of our life at every step; we lose the true standard of values and are distracted by the false claims of the varied interests of life contending with one another. It is this failure to bring all the elements of his nature under the unity and control of the Supreme One that makes man feel the pang of his separation from God and gives rise to the earnest prayer, *O God, O Father, completely sweep away all our sins.* 29 *Give unto us that which is good* 30 , the good which is the daily bread of our souls. In our pleasures we are confined to ourselves, in the good we are freed and we belong to all. As the child in its mother's womb gets its sustenance through the union of its life with the larger life of its mother, so our soul is nourished only through the good which is the recognition of its inner kinship, the channel of its communication with the infinite by which it is surrounded and fed. Hence it is said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." For righteousness is the divine food of the soul; nothing but this can fill him, can make him live the life of the infinite, can help him in his growth towards the eternal. *We bow to thee from whom come the enjoyments of our life.* 31 *We bow also to thee from whom comes the good of our soul.* 32 *We bow to thee who art good, the highest good* 33 , in whom we are united with everything, that is, in peace and harmony, in goodness and love.

Man's cry is to reach his fullest expression. It is this desire for self-expression that leads him to seek wealth and power. But he has to discover that accumulation is not realisation. It is the inner light that reveals him, not outer things. When this light is lighted, then in a moment he knows that Man's highest revelation is God's own revelation in him. And his cry is for this--the manifestation of his soul, which is the manifestation of God in his soul. Man becomes perfect man, he attains his fullest expression, when his soul realises itself in the Infinite being who is *Āvih* whose very essence is expression.

The real misery of man is in the fact that he has not fully come out, that he is self-obscured, lost in the midst of his own desires. He cannot feel himself beyond his personal surroundings, his greater self is blotted out, his truth is unrealised. The prayer that rises up from his whole being is therefore, *Thou,*

who art the spirit of manifestation, manifest thyself in me. [34] **This longing for the perfect expression of his self is more deeply inherent in man than his hunger and thirst for bodily sustenance, his lust for wealth and distinction. This prayer is not merely one born individually of him; it is in depth of all things, it is the ceaseless urging in him of the *Āvih*, of the spirit of eternal manifestation. The revealment of the infinite in the finite, which is the motive of all creation, is not seen in its perfection in the starry heavens, in the beauty of flowers. It is in the soul of man. For there will seeks its manifestation in will, and freedom turns to win its final prize in the freedom of surrender.**

Therefore, it is the self of man which the great King of the universe has not shadowed with his throne--he has left it free. In his physical and mental organism, where man is related with nature, he has to acknowledge the rule of his King, but in his self he is free to disown him. There our God must win his entrance. There he comes as a guest, not as a king, and therefore he has to wait till he is invited. It is the man's self from which God has withdrawn his commands, for there he comes to court our love. His armed force, the laws of nature, stand outside its gate, and only beauty, the messenger of his love, finds admission within its precincts.

It is only in this region of will that anarchy is permitted; only in man's self that the discord of untruth and unrighteousness hold its reign; and things can come to such a pass that we may cry out in our anguish, "Such utter lawlessness could never prevail if there were a God!" Indeed, God has stood aside from our self, where his watchful patience knows no bounds, and where he never forces open the doors if shut against him. For this self of ours has to attain its ultimate meaning, which is the soul, not through the compulsion of God's power but through love, and thus become united with God in freedom.

He whose spirit has been made one with God stands before man as the supreme flower of humanity. There man finds in truth what he is; for there the *Āvih* is revealed to him in the soul of man as the most perfect revelation for him of God; for there we see the union of the supreme will with our will, our love with the love everlasting.

Therefore, in our country he who truly loves God receives such homage from men as would be considered almost sacrilegious in the west. We see in him God's wish fulfilled, the most difficult of all obstacles to his revealment removed, and God's own perfect joy fully blossoming in humanity. Through him we find the whole world of man overspread with a divine homeliness. His life, burning with God's love, makes all our earthly love resplendent. All the intimate associations of our life, all its experience of pleasure and pain, group themselves around this display of the divine love, and from the drama that we witness in him. The touch of an infinite mystery passes over the trivial and the familiar, making it break out into ineffable music. The trees and the stars and the blue hills appear to us as symbols aching with a meaning which can never

be uttered in words. We seem to watch the Master in the very act of creation of a new world when a man's soul draws her heavy curtain of self aside, when her veil is lifted and she is face to face with her eternal lover.

But what is this state? It is like a morning of spring, varied in its life and beauty, yet one and entire. When a man's life rescued from distractions finds its unity in the soul, then the consciousness of the infinite becomes at once direct and natural to it as the light is to the flame. All the conflicts and contradictions of life are reconciled; knowledge, love and action harmonized; pleasure and pain become one in beauty, enjoyment and renunciation equal in goodness; the breach between the finite and the infinite fills with love and overflows; every moment carries its message of the eternal; the formless appears to us in the form of the flower, of the fruit; the boundless takes us up in his arms as a father and walks by our side as a friend. It is only the soul, the One in man which by its very nature can overcome all limits, and finds its affinity with the Supreme One. While yet we have not attained the internal harmony, and the wholeness of our being, our life remains a life of habits. The world still appears to us as a machine, to be mastered where it is useful, to be guarded against where it is dangerous, and never to be known in its full fellowship with us, alike in its physical nature and in its spiritual life and beauty.

Footnotes

20 **Na vā arē putrasya kāmāya putrah priyō bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya putrah priyō bhavati.**

21 **Tamēvaikam jānatha ātmānam.**

22 **Amritasyaisha sētuh.**

23 **Ēkam rūpam bahudhā yah karōti * * tam ātmastham yē anupaçyanti dīhrāh, tēshām sukham çāçvatam nētarēshām.**

24 **Ēsha dēvō vishvakarmā mahātmā sadā janānām hridayē sannivishtah. Hridā manīsha manasābhiklriptō ya ētad viduramritāstē bhavanti.**

25 **Āvirāvīrmayēdhi.**

26 **Rudra yat tē dakshinam mukham tēna mām pāhi nityam.**

27 **Asatōmā sadgamaya, tamasōmā jyōtirgamaya, mrityōrma mritangamaya.**

28 **Vishvānidēva savitar duratāni parāsuva.**

29 **Vishvāni dēva savitar duritāni parāsuva.**

30 **Yad bhadram tanna āsuva.**

31 **Namah sambhavāya.**

32 **Namah çankarāyacha.**

33 **Namah çivāyacha, çivatarāya cha.**

34 **Āvirāvīrmayēdhi.**

III

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The question why there is evil in existence is the same as why there is imperfection, or, in other words, why there is creation at all. We must take it for granted that it could not be otherwise; that creation must be imperfect, must be gradual, and that it is futile to ask the question, Why we are?

But this is the real question we ought to ask: Is this imperfection the final truth, is evil absolute and ultimate? The river has its boundaries, its banks, but is a river all banks? or are the banks the final facts about the river? Do not these obstructions themselves give its water an onward motion? The towing rope binds a boat, but is the bondage its meaning? Does it not at the same time draw the boat forward?

The current of the world has its boundaries, otherwise it could have no existence, but its purpose is not shown in the boundaries which restrain it, but in its movement, which is towards perfection. The wonder is not that there should be obstacles and sufferings in this world, but that there should be law and order, beauty and joy, goodness and love. The idea of God that man has in his being is the wonder of all wonders. He has felt in the depths of his life that what appears as imperfect is the manifestation of the perfect; just as a man who has an ear for music realises the perfection of a song, while in fact he is only listening to a succession of notes. Man has found out the great paradox that what is limited is not imprisoned within its limits; it is ever moving, and therewith shedding its finitude every moment. In fact, imperfection is not a negation of perfectness; finitude is not contradictory to infinity: they are but completeness manifested in parts, infinity revealed within bounds.

Pain, which is the feeling of our finiteness, is not a fixture in our life. It is not an end in itself, as joy is. To meet with it is to know that it has no part in the

true permanence of creation. It is what error is in our intellectual life. To go through the history of the development of science is to go through the maze of mistakes it made current at different times. Yet no one really believes that science is the one perfect mode of disseminating mistakes. The progressive ascertainment of truth is the important thing to remember in the history of science, not its innumerable mistakes. Error, by its nature, cannot be stationary; it cannot remain with truth; like a tramp, it must quit its lodging as soon as it fails to pay its score to the full.

As in intellectual error, so in evil of any other form, its essence is impermanence, for it cannot accord with the whole. Every moment it is being corrected by the totality of things and keeps changing its aspect. We exaggerate its importance by imagining it as a standstill. Could we collect the statistics of the immense amount of death and putrefaction happening every moment in this earth, they would appal us. But evil is ever moving; with all its incalculable immensity it does not effectually clog the current of our life; and we find that the earth, water, and air remain sweet and pure for living beings. All statistics consist of our attempts to represent statistically what is in motion; and in the process things assume a weight in our mind which they have not in reality. For this reason a man, who by his profession is concerned with any particular aspect of life, is apt to magnify its proportions; in laying undue stress upon facts he loses his hold upon truth. A detective may have the opportunity of studying crimes in detail, but he loses his sense of their relative places in the whole social economy. When science collects facts to illustrate the struggle for existence that is going on in the kingdom of life, it raises a picture in our minds of "nature red in tooth and claw." But in these mental pictures we give a fixity to colours and forms which are really evanescent. It is like calculating the weight of the air on each square inch of our body to prove that it must be crushingly heavy for us. With every weight, however, there is an adjustment, and we lightly bear our burden. With the struggle for existence in nature there is reciprocity. There is the love for children and for comrades; there is the sacrifice of self, which springs from love; and this love is the positive element in life.

If we kept the search-light of our observation turned upon the fact of death, the world would appear to us like a huge charnel- house; but in the world of life the thought of death has, we find, the least possible hold upon our minds. Not because it is the least apparent, but because it is the negative aspect of life; just as, in spite of the fact that we shut our eyelids every second, it is the openings of the eye that count. Life as a whole never takes death seriously. It laughs, dances and plays, it builds, hoards and loves in death's face. Only when we detach one individual fact of death do we see its blankness and become dismayed. We lose sight of the wholeness of a life of which death is part. It is like looking at a piece of cloth through a microscope. It appears like a net; we gaze at the big holes and shiver in imagination. But the truth is, death is not

the ultimate reality. It looks black, as the sky looks blue; but it does not blacken existence, just as the sky does not leave its stain upon the wings of the bird.

When we watch a child trying to walk, we see its countless failures; its successes are but few. If we had to limit our observation within a narrow space of time, the sight would be cruel. But we find that in spite of its repeated failures there is an impetus of joy in the child which sustains it in its seemingly impossible task. We see it does not think of its falls so much as of its power to keep its balance though for only a moment.

Like these accidents in a child's attempts to walk, we meet with sufferings in various forms in our life every day, showing the imperfections in our knowledge and our available power, and in the application of our will. But if these revealed our weakness to us only, we should die of utter depression. When we select for observation a limited area of our activities, our individual failures and miseries loom large in our minds; but our life leads us instinctively to take a wider view. It gives us an ideal of perfection which ever carries us beyond our present limitations. Within us we have a hope which always walks in front of our present narrow experience; it is the undying faith in the infinite in us; it will never accept any of our disabilities as a permanent fact; it sets no limit to its own scope; it dares to assert that man has oneness with God; and its wild dreams become true every day.

We see the truth when we set our mind towards the infinite. The ideal of truth is not in the narrow present, not in our immediate sensations, but in the consciousness of the whole which give us a taste of what we *should* have in what we *do* have. Consciously or unconsciously we have in our life this feeling of Truth which is ever larger than its appearance; for our life is facing the infinite, and it is in movement. Its aspiration is therefore infinitely more than its achievement, and as it goes on it finds that no realisation of truth ever leaves it stranded on the desert of finality, but carries it to a region beyond. Evil cannot altogether arrest the course of life on the highway and rob it of its possessions. For the evil has to pass on, it has to grow into good; it cannot stand and give battle to the All. If the least evil could stop anywhere indefinitely, it would sink deep and cut into the very roots of existence. As it is, man does not really believe in evil, just as he cannot believe that violin strings have been purposely made to create the exquisite torture of discordant notes, though by the aid of statistics it can be mathematically proved that the probability of discord is far greater than that of harmony, and for one who can play the violin there are thousands who cannot. The potentiality of perfection outweighs actual contradictions. No doubt there have been people who asserted existence to be an absolute evil, but man can never take them seriously. Their pessimism is a mere pose, either intellectual or sentimental; but life itself is optimistic: it wants to go on. Pessimism is a form of mental dipsomania, it disdains healthy nourishment, indulges in the strong drink of

denunciation, and creates an artificial dejection which thirsts for a stronger draught. If existence were an evil, it would wait for no philosopher to prove it. It is like convicting a man of suicide, while all the time he stands before you in the flesh. Existence itself is here to prove that it cannot be an evil.

An imperfection which is not all imperfection, but which has perfection for its ideal, must go through a perpetual realisation. Thus, it is the function of our intellect to realise the truth through untruths, and knowledge is nothing but the continually burning up of error to set free the light of truth. Our will, our character, has to attain perfection by continually overcoming evils, either inside or outside us, or both; our physical life is consuming bodily materials every moment to maintain the life fire; and our moral life too has its fuel to burn. This life process is going on--we know it, we have felt it; and we have a faith which no individual instances to the contrary can shake, that the direction of humanity is from evil to good. For we feel that good is the positive element in man's nature, and in every age and every clime what man values most is his ideals of goodness. We have known the good, we have loved it, and we have paid our highest reverence to men who have shown in their lives what goodness is.

The question will be asked, What is goodness; what does our moral nature mean? My answer is, that when a man begins to have an extended vision of his self, when he realises that he is much more than at present he seems to be, he begins to get conscious of his moral nature. Then he grows aware of that which he is yet to be, and the state not yet experienced by him becomes more real than that under his direct experience. Necessarily, his perspective of life changes, and his will takes the place of his wishes. For will is the supreme wish of the larger life, the life whose greater portion is out of our present reach, most of whose objects are not before our sight. Then comes the conflict of our lesser man with our greater man, of our wishes with our will, of the desire for things affecting our senses with the purpose that is within our heart. Then we begin to distinguish between what we immediately desire and what is good. For good is that which is desirable for our greater self. Thus the sense of goodness comes out of a truer view of our life, which is the connected view of the wholeness of the field of life, and which takes into account not only what is present before us but what is not, and perhaps never humanly can be. Man, who is provident, feels for that life of his which is not yet existent, feels much more that than for the life that is with him; therefore he is ready to sacrifice his present inclination for the unrealised future. In this he becomes great, for he realises truth. Even to be efficiently selfish one has to recognise this truth, and has to curb his immediate impulses--in other words, has to be moral. For our moral faculty is the faculty by which we know that life is not made up of fragments, purposeless and discontinuous. This moral sense of man not only gives him the power to see that the self has a continuity in time, but it also enables him to see that he is not true when he is only restricted to his own self.

He is more in truth than he is in fact. He truly belongs to individuals who are not included in his own individuality, and whom he is never even likely to know. As he has a feeling for his future self which is outside his present consciousness, so he has a feeling for his greater self which is outside the limits of his personality. There is no man who has not this feeling to some extent, who has never sacrificed his selfish desire for the sake of some other person, who has never felt a pleasure in undergoing some loss or trouble because it pleased somebody else. It is a truth that man is not a detached being, that he has a universal aspect; and when he recognises this he becomes great. Even the most evilly-disposed selfishness has to recognise this when it seeks the power to do evil; for it cannot ignore truth and yet be strong. So in order to claim the aid of truth, selfishness has to be unselfish to some extent. A band of robbers must be moral in order to hold together as a band; they may rob the whole world but not each other. To make an immoral intention successful, some of its weapons must be moral. In fact, very often it is our very moral strength which gives us most effectively the power to do evil, to exploit other individuals for our own benefit, to rob other people of their rights. The life of an animal is unmoral, for it is aware only of an immediate present; the life of a man can be immoral, but that only means that it must have a moral basis. What is immoral is imperfectly moral, just as what is false is true to a small extent, or it cannot even be false. Not to see is to be blind, but to see wrongly is to see only in an imperfect manner. Man's selfishness is a beginning to see some connection, some purpose in life; and to act in accordance with its dictates requires self-restraint and regulation of conduct. A selfish man willingly undergoes troubles for the sake of the self, he suffers hardship and privation without a murmur, simply because he knows that what is pain and trouble, looked at from the point of view of a short space of time, are just the opposite when seen in a larger perspective. Thus what is a loss to the smaller man is a gain to the greater, and *vice versa*.

To the man who lives for an idea, for his country, for the good of humanity, life has an extensive meaning, and to that extent pain becomes less important to him. To live the life of goodness is to live the life of all. Pleasure is for one's own self, but goodness is concerned with the happiness of all humanity and for all time. From the point of view of the good, pleasure and pain appear in a different meaning; so much so, that pleasure may be shunned, and pain be courted in its place, and death itself be made welcome as giving a higher value to life. From these higher standpoints of a man's life, the standpoints of the good, pleasure and pain lose their absolute value. Martyrs prove it in history, and we prove it every day in our life in our little martyrdoms. When we take a pitcherful of water from the sea it has its weight, but when we take a dip into the sea itself a thousand pitchersful of water flow above our head, and we do not feel their weight. We have to carry the pitcher of self with our strength; and so, while on the plane of selfishness pleasure and pain have their full weight, on the moral plane they are so much lightened that the man who has reached it

appears to us almost superhuman in his patience under crushing trails, and his forbearance in the face of malignant persecution.

To live in perfect goodness is to realise one's life in the infinitive. This is the most comprehensive view of life which we can have by our inherent power of the moral vision of the wholeness of life. And the teaching of Buddha is to cultivate this moral power to the highest extent, to know that our field of activities is not bound to the plane of our narrow self. This is the vision of the heavenly kingdom of Christ. When we attain to that universal life, which is the moral life, we become freed from the bonds of pleasure and pain, and the place vacated by our self becomes filled with an unspeakable joy which springs from measureless love. In this state the soul's activity is all the more heightened, only its motive power is not from desires, but in its own joy. This is the *Karma-yoga* of the *Gita*, the way to become one with the infinite activity by the exercise of the activity of disinterested goodness.

When Buddha mentioned upon the way of realising mankind from the grip of misery he came to this truth: that when man attains his highest end by merging the individual in the universal, he becomes free from the thraldom of pain. Let us consider this point more fully.

A student of mine once related to me his adventure in a storm, and complained that all the time he was troubled with the feeling that this great commotion in nature behaved to him as if he were no more than a mere handful of dust. That he was a distinct personality with a will of his own had not the least influence upon what was happening.

I said, "If consideration for our individuality could sway nature from her path, then it would be the individuals who would suffer most."

But he persisted in his doubt, saying that there was this fact which could not be ignored--the feeling that I am. The "I" in us seeks for a relation which is individual to it.

I replied that the relation of the "I" is with something which is "not-I." So we must have a medium which is common to both, and we must be absolutely certain that it is the same to the "I" as it is to the "not-I."

This is what needs repeating here. We have to keep in mind that our individuality by its nature is impelled to seek for the universal. Our body can only die if it tries to eat its own substance, and our eye loses the meaning of its function if it can only see itself.

Just as we find that the stronger the imagination the less is it merely imaginary and the more is it in harmony with truth, so we see the more vigorous our individuality the more does it widen towards the universal. For the greatness of

a personality is not in itself but in its content, which is universal, just as the depth of a lake is judged not by the size of its cavity but by the depth of its water.

So, if it is a truth that the yearning of our nature is for reality, and that our personality cannot be happy with a fantastic universe of its own creation, then it is clearly best for it that our will can only deal with things by following their law, and cannot do with them just as it pleases. This unyielding sureness of reality sometimes crosses our will, and very often leads us to disaster, just as the firmness of the earth invariably hurts the falling child who is learning to walk. Nevertheless it is the same firmness that hurts him which makes his walking possible. Once, while passing under a bridge, the mast of my boat got stuck in one of its girders. If only for a moment the mast would have bent an inch or two, or the bridge raised its back like a yawning cat, or the river given in, it would have been all right with me. But they took no notice of my helplessness. That is the very reason why I could make use of the river, and sail upon it with the help of the mast, and that is why, when its current was inconvenient, I could rely upon the bridge. Things are what they are, and we have to know them if we would deal with them, and knowledge of them is possible because our wish is not their law. This knowledge is a joy to us, for the knowledge is one of the channels of our relation with the things outside us; it is making them our own, and thus widening the limit of our self.

At every step we have to take into account others than ourselves. For only in death are we alone. A poet is a true poet when he can make his personal idea joyful to all men, which he could not do if he had not a medium common to all his audience. This common language has its own law which the poet must discover and follow, by doing which he becomes true and attains poetical immortality.

We see then that man's individuality is not his highest truth; there is that in him which is universal. If he were made to live in a world where his own self was the only factor to consider, then that would be the worst prison imaginable to him, for man's deepest joy is in growing greater and greater by more and more union with the all. This, as we have seen, would be an impossibility if there were no law common to all. Only by discovering the law and following it, do we become great, do we realise the universal; while, so long as our individual desires are at conflict with the universal law, we suffer pain and are futile.

There was a time when we prayed for special concessions, we expected that the laws of nature should be held in abeyance for our own convenience. But now we know better. We know that law cannot be set aside, and in this knowledge we have become strong. For this law is not something apart from us; it is our own. The universal power which is manifested in the universal law is one with our own power. It will thwart us where we are small, where we are

against the current of things; but it will help us where we are great, where we are in unison with the all. Thus, through the help of science, as we come to know more of the laws of nature, we gain in power; we tend to attain a universal body. Our organ of sight, our organ of locomotion, our physical strength becomes world-wide; steam and electricity become our nerve and muscle. Thus we find that, just as throughout our bodily organisation there is a principle of relation by virtue of which we can call the entire body our own, and can use it as such, so all through the universe there is that principle of uninterrupted relation by virtue of which we can call the whole world our extended body and use it accordingly. And in this age of science it is our endeavour fully to establish our claim to our world-self. We know all our poverty and sufferings are owing to our inability to realise this legitimate claim of ours. Really, there is no limit to our powers, for we are not outside the universal power which is the expression of universal law. We are on our way to overcome disease and death, to conquer pain and poverty; for through scientific knowledge we are ever on our way to realise the universal in its physical aspect. And as we make progress we find that pain, disease, and poverty of power are not absolute, but that is only the want of adjustment of our individual self to our universal self which gives rise to them.

It is the same with our spiritual life. When the individual man in us chafes against the lawful rule of the universal man we become morally small, and we must suffer. In such a condition our successes are our greatest failures, and the very fulfilment of our desires leaves us poorer. We hanker after special gains for ourselves, we want to enjoy privileges which none else can share with us. But everything that is absolutely special must keep up a perpetual warfare with what is general. In such a state of civil war man always lives behind barricades, and in any civilisation which is selfish our homes are not real homes, but artificial barriers around us. Yet we complain that we are not happy, as if there were something inherent in the nature of things to make us miserable. The universal spirit is waiting to crown us with happiness, but our individual spirit would not accept it. It is our life of the self that causes conflicts and complications everywhere, upsets the normal balance of society and gives rise to miseries of all kinds. It brings things to such a pass that to maintain order we have to create artificial coercions and organised forms of tyranny, and tolerate infernal institutions in our midst, whereby at every moment humanity is humiliated.

We have seen that in order to be powerful we have to submit to the laws of the universal forces, and to realise in practice that they are our own. So, in order to be happy, we have to submit our individual will to the sovereignty of the universal will, and to feel in truth that it is our own will. When we reach that state wherein the adjustment of the finite in us to the infinite is made perfect, then pain itself becomes a valuable asset. It becomes a measuring rod with which to gauge the true value of our joy.

The most important lesson that man can learn from his life is not that there *is* pain in this world, but that it depends upon him to turn it into good account, that it is possible for him to transmute it into joy. The lesson has not been lost altogether to us, and there is no man living who would willingly be deprived of his right to suffer pain, for that is his right to be a man. One day the wife of a poor labourer complained bitterly to me that her eldest boy was going to be sent away to a rich relative's house for part of the year. It was the implied kind intention of trying to relieve her of her trouble that gave her the shock, for a mother's trouble is a mother's own by her inalienable right of love, and she was not going to surrender it to any dictates of expediency. Man's freedom is never in being saved troubles, but it is the freedom to take trouble for his own good, to make the trouble an element in his joy. It can be made so only when we realise that our individual self is not the highest meaning of our being, that in us we have the world-man who is immortal, who is not afraid of death or sufferings, and who looks upon pain as only the other side of joy. He who has realised this knows that it is pain which is our true wealth as imperfect beings, and has made us great and worthy to take our seat with the perfect. He knows that we are not beggars; that it is the hard coin which must be paid for everything valuable in this life, for our power, our wisdom, our love; that in pain is symbolised the infinite possibility of perfection, the eternal unfolding of joy; and the man who loses all pleasure in accepting pain sinks down and down to the lowest depth of penury and degradation. It is only when we invoke the aid of pain for our self-gratification that she becomes evil and takes her vengeance for the insult done to her by hurling us into misery. For she is the vestal virgin consecrated to the service of the immortal perfection, and when she takes her true place before the altar of the infinite she casts off her dark veil and bares her face to the beholder as a revelation of supreme joy.

IV

THE PROBLEM OF SELF

At one pole of my being I am one with stocks and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies, deep down below. Its strength lies in its being held firm in the clasp of comprehensive world, and in the fullness of its community with all things.

But at the other pole of my being I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable. The whole weight of the universe cannot crush out this individuality of mine. I maintain it in spite of the tremendous gravitation of all things. It is small in appearance but great in

reality. For it holds its own against the forces that would rob it of its distinction and make it one with the dust.

This is the superstructure of the self which rises from the indeterminate depth and darkness of its foundation into the open, proud of its isolation, proud of having given shape to a single individual idea of the architect's which has no duplicate in the whole universe. If this individuality be demolished, then though no material be lost, not an atom destroyed, the creative joy which was crystallised therein is gone. We are absolutely bankrupt if we are deprived of this specialty, this individuality, which is the only thing we can call our own; and which, if lost, is also a loss to the whole world. It is most valuable because it is not universal. And therefore only through it can we gain the universe more truly than if we were lying within its breast unconscious of our distinctiveness. The universal is ever seeking its consummation in the unique. And the desire we have to keep our uniqueness intact is really the desire of the universe acting in us. It is our joy of the infinite in us that gives us our joy in ourselves.

That this separateness of self is considered by man as his most precious possession is proved by the sufferings he undergoes and the sins he commits for its sake. But the consciousness of separation has come from the eating of the fruit of knowledge. It has led man to shame and crime and death; yet it is dearer to him than any paradise where the self lies, securely slumbering in perfect innocence in the womb of mother nature.

It is a constant striving and suffering for us to maintain the separateness of this self of ours. And in fact it is this suffering which measures its value. One side of the value is sacrifice, which represents how much the cost has been. The other side of it is the attainment, which represents how much has been gained. If the self meant nothing to us but pain and sacrifice, it could have no value for us, and on no account would we willingly undergo such sacrifice. In such case there could be no doubt at all that the highest object of humanity would be the annihilation of self.

But if there is a corresponding gain, if it does not end in a void but in a fullness, then it is clear that its negative qualities, its very sufferings and sacrifices, make it all the more precious. That it is so has been proved by those who have realised the positive significance of self, and have accepted its responsibilities with eagerness and undergone sacrifices without flinching.

With the foregoing introduction it will be easy for me to answer the question once asked by one of my audience as to whether the annihilation of self has not been held by India as the supreme goal of humanity?

In the first place we must keep in mind the fact that man is never literal in the expression of his ideas, except in matters most trivial. Very often man's words are not a language at all, but merely a vocal gesture of the dumb. They may

indicate, but do not express his thoughts. The more vital his thoughts the more have his words to be explained by the context of his life. Those who seek to know his meaning by the aid of the dictionary only technically reach the house, for they are stopped by the outside wall and find no entrance to the hall. This is the reason why the teachings of our greatest prophets give rise to endless disputations when we try to understand them by following their words and not be realising them in our own lives. The men who are cursed with the gift of the literal mind are the unfortunate ones who are always busy with their nets and neglect the fishing.

It is not only in Buddhism and the Indian religions, but in Christianity too, that the ideal of selflessness is preached with all fervour. In the last the symbol of death has been used for expressing the idea of man's deliverance from the life which is not true. This is the same as Nirvnāna, the symbol of the extinction of the lamp.

In the typical thought of India it is held that the true deliverance of man is the deliverance from *avidyā*, from ignorance. It is not in destroying anything that is positive and real, for that cannot be possible, but that which is negative, which obstructs our vision of truth. When this obstruction, which is ignorance, is removed, then only is the eyelid drawn up which is no loss to the eye.

It is our ignorance which makes us think that our self, as self, is real, that it has its complete meaning in itself. When we take that wrong view of self then we try to live in such a manner as to make self the ultimate object of our life. Then we are doomed to disappointment like the man who tries to reach his destination by firmly clutching the dust of the road. Our self has no means of holding us, for its own nature is to pass on; and by clinging to this thread of self which is passing through the loom of life we cannot make it serve the purpose of the cloth into which it is being woven. When a man, with elaborate care, arranges for an enjoyment of the self, he lights a fire but has no dough to make his bread with; the fire flares up and consumes itself to extinction, like an unnatural beast that eats its own progeny and dies.

In an unknown language the words are tyrannically prominent. They stop us but say nothing. To be rescued from this fetter of words we must rid ourselves of the *avidyā*, our ignorance, and then our mind will find its freedom in the inner idea. But it would be foolish to say that our ignorance of the language can be dispelled only by the destruction of the words. No, when the perfect knowledge comes, every word remains in its place, only they do not bind us to themselves, but let us pass through them and lead us to the idea which is emancipation.

Thus it is only *avidyā* which makes the self our fetter by making us think that it is an end in itself, and by preventing our seeing that it contains the idea that transcends its limits. That is why the wise man comes and says, "Set

yourselves free from the *avidyā*; know your true soul and be saved from the grasp of the self which imprisons you."

We gain our freedom when we attain our truest nature. The man who is an artist finds his artistic freedom when he finds his ideal of art. Then is he freed from laborious attempts at imitation, from the goadings of popular approbation. It is the function of religion not to destroy our nature but to fulfil it.

The Sanskrit word *dharma* which is usually translated into English as religion has a deeper meaning in our language. *Dharma* is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth, of all things. *Dharma* is the ultimate purpose that is working in our self. When any wrong is done we say that *dharma* is violated, meaning that the lie has been given to our true nature.

But this *dharma*, which is the truth in us, is not apparent, because it is inherent. So much so, that it has been held that sinfulness is the nature of man, and only by the special grace of God can a particular person be saved. This is like saying that the nature of the seed is to remain enfolded within its shell, and it is only by some special miracle that it can be grown into a tree. But do we not know that the *appearance* of the seed contradicts its true nature? When you submit it to chemical analysis you may find in it carbon and proteid and a good many other things, but not the idea of a branching tree. Only when the tree begins to take shape do you come to see its *dharma*, and then you can affirm without doubt that the seed which has been wasted and allowed to rot in the ground has been thwarted in its *dharma*, in the fulfilment of its true nature. In the history of humanity we have known the living seed in us to sprout. We have seen the great purpose in us taking shape in the lives of our greatest men, and have felt certain that though there are numerous individual lives that seem ineffectual, still it is not their *dharma* to remain barren; but it is for them to burst their cover and transform themselves into a vigorous spiritual shoot, growing up into the air and light, and branching out in all directions.

The freedom of the seed is in the attainment of its *dharma*, its nature and destiny of becoming a tree; it is the non-accomplishment which is its prison. The sacrifice by which a thing attains its fulfilment is not a sacrifice which ends in death; it is the casting-off of bonds which wins freedom.

When we know the highest ideal of freedom which a man has, we know his *dharma*, the essence of his nature, the real meaning of his self. At first sight it seems that man counts that as freedom by which he gets unbounded opportunities of self gratification and self-aggrandisement. But surely this is not borne out by history. Our revelatory men have always been those who have lived the life of self-sacrifice. The higher nature in man always seeks for something which transcends itself and yet is its deepest truth; which claims all its sacrifice, yet makes this sacrifice its own recompense. This is man's

dharma, man's religion, and man's self is the vessel which is to carry this sacrifice to the altar.

We can look at our self in its two different aspects. The self which displays itself, and the self which transcends itself and thereby reveals its own meaning. To display itself it tries to be big, to stand upon the pedestal of its accumulations, and to retain everything to itself. To reveal itself it gives up everything it has; thus becoming perfect like a flower that has blossomed out from the bud, pouring from its chalice of beauty all its sweetness.

The lamp contains its oil, which it holds securely in its close grasp and guards from the least loss. Thus is it separate from all other objects around it and is miserly. But when lighted it finds its meaning at once; its relation with all things far and near is established, and it freely sacrifices its fund of oil to feed the flame.

Such a lamp is our self. So long as it hoards its possessions it keeps itself dark, its conduct contradicts its true purpose. When it finds illumination it forgets itself in a moment, holds the light high, and serves it with everything it has; for therein is its revelation. This revelation is the freedom which Buddha preached. He asked the lamp to give up its oil. But purposeless giving up is a still darker poverty which he never could have meant. The lamp must give up its oil to the light and thus set free the purpose it has in its hoarding. This is emancipation. The path Buddha pointed out was not merely the practice of self- abnegation, but the widening of love. And therein lies the true meaning of Buddha's preaching.

When we find that the state of *Nirvāna* preached by Buddha is through love, then we know for certain that *Nirvāna* is the highest culmination of love. For love is an end unto itself. Everything else raises the question "Why?" in our mind, and we require a reason for it. But when we say, "I love," then there is no room for the "why"; it is the final answer in itself.

Doubtless, even selfishness impels one to give away. But the selfish man does it on compulsion. That is like plucking fruit when it is unripe; you have to tear it from the tree and bruise the branch. But when a man loves, giving becomes a matter of joy to him, like the tree's surrender of the ripe fruit. All our belongings assume a weight by the ceaseless gravitation of our selfish desires; we cannot easily cast them away from us. They seem to belong to our very nature, to stick to us as a second skin, and we bleed as we detach them. But when we are possessed by love, its force acts in the opposite direction. The things that closely adhered to us lose their adhesion and weight, and we find that they are not of us. Far from being a loss to give them away, we find in that the fulfilment of our being.

Thus we find in perfect love the freedom of our self. That only which is done for love is done freely, however much pain it may cause. Therefore working for love is freedom in action. This is the meaning of the teaching of disinterested work in the *Gīta*.

The *Gīta* says action we must have, for only in action do we manifest our nature. But this manifestation is not perfect so long as our action is not free. In fact, our nature is obscured by work done by the compulsion of want or fear. The mother reveals herself in the service of her children, so our true freedom is not the freedom *from* action but freedom *in* action, which can only be attained in the work of love.

God's manifestation is in his work of creation and it is said in the Upanishad, *Knowledge, power, and action are of his nature* [35] ; they are not imposed upon him from outside. Therefore his work is his freedom, and in his creation he realises himself. The same thing is said elsewhere in other words: *From joy does spring all this creation, by joy is it maintained, towards joy does it progress, and into joy does it enter.* [36] It means that God's creation has not its source in any necessity; it comes from his fullness of joy; it is his love that creates, therefore in creation is his own revealment.

The artist who has a joy in the fullness of his artistic idea objectifies it and thus gains it more fully by holding it afar. It is joy which detaches ourselves from us, and then gives it form in creations of love in order to make it more perfectly our own. Hence there must be this separation, not a separation of repulsion but a separation of love. Repulsion has only the one element, the element of severance. But love has two, the element of severance, which is only an appearance, and the element of union which is the ultimate truth. Just as when the father tosses his child up from his arms it has the appearance of rejection but its truth is quite the reverse.

So we must know that the meaning of our self is not to be found in its separateness from God and others, but in the ceaseless realisation of *yoga*, of union; not on the side of the canvas where it is blank, but on the side where the picture is being painted.

This is the reason why the separateness of our self has been described by our philosophers as *māyā*, as an illusion, because it has no intrinsic reality of its own. It looks perilous; it raises its isolation to a giddy height and casts a black shadow upon the fair face of existence; from the outside it has an aspect of a sudden disruption, rebellious and destructive; it is proud, domineering and wayward; it is ready to rob the world of all its wealth to gratify its craving of a moment; to pluck with a reckless, cruel hand all the plumes from the divine bird of beauty to deck its ugliness for a day; indeed man's legend has it that it bears the black mark of disobedience stamped on its forehead for ever; but still

all this *māyā*, envelopment of *avidyā*; it is the mist, it is not the sun; it is the black smoke that presages the fire of love.

Imagine some savage who, in his ignorance, thinks that it is the paper of the banknote that has the magic, by virtue of which the possessor of it gets all he wants. He piles up the papers, hides them, handles them in all sorts of absurd ways, and then at last, wearied by his efforts, comes to the sad conclusion that they are absolutely worthless, only fit to be thrown into the fire. But the wise man knows that the paper of the banknote is all *māyā*, and until it is given up to the bank it is futile. It is only *avidyā*, our ignorance, that makes us believe that the separateness of our self like the paper of the banknote is precious in itself, and by acting on this belief our self is rendered valueless. It is only when the *avidyā* is removed that this very self comes to us with a wealth which is priceless. For *He manifests Himself in forms which His joy assumes.* [37] These forms are separate from Him, and the value that these forms have is only what his joy has imparted to them. When we transfer back these forms into that original joy, which is love, then we cash them in the bank and we find their truth.

When pure necessity drives man to his work it takes an accidental and contingent character, it becomes a mere makeshift arrangement; it is deserted and left in ruins when necessity changes its course. But when his work is the outcome of joy, the forms that it takes have the elements of immortality. The immortal in man imparts to it its own quality of permanence.

Our self, as a form of God's joy, is deathless. For his joy is *amritham*, eternal. This it is in us which makes us sceptical of death, even when the fact of death cannot be doubted. In reconcilement of this contradiction in us we come to the truth that in the dualism of death and life there is a harmony. We know that the life of a soul, which is finite in its expression and infinite in its principle, must go through the portals of death in its journey to realise the infinite. It is death which is monistic, it has no life in it. But life is dualistic; it has an appearance as well as truth; and death is that appearance, that *māyā*, which is an inseparable companion to life. Our self to live must go through a continual change and growth of form, which may be termed a continual death and a continual life going on at the same time. It is really courting death when we refuse to accept death; when we wish to give the form of the self some fixed changelessness; when the self feels no impulse which urges it to grow out of itself; when it treats its limits as final and acts accordingly. Then comes our teacher's call to die to this death; not a call to annihilation but to eternal life. It is the extinction of the lamp in the morning light; not the abolition of the sun. It is really asking us consciously to give effect to the innermost wish that we have in the depths of our nature.

We have a dual set of desires in our being, which it should be our endeavour to bring into a harmony. In the region of our physical nature we have one set of

which we are conscious always. We wish to enjoy our food and drink, we hanker after bodily pleasure and comfort. These desires are self-centered; they are solely concerned with their respective impulses. The wishes of our palate often run counter to what our stomach can allow.

But we have another set, which is the desire of our physical system as a whole, of which we are usually unconscious. It is the wish for health. This is always doing its work, mending and repairing, making new adjustments in cases of accident, and skilfully restoring the balance wherever disturbed. It has no concern with the fulfilment of our immediate bodily desires, but it goes beyond the present time. It is the principle of our physical wholeness, it links our life with its past and its future and maintains the unity of its parts. He who is wise knows it, and makes his other physical wishes harmonise with it.

We have a greater body which is the social body. Society is an organism, of which we as parts have our individual wishes. We want our own pleasure and license. We want to pay less and gain more than anybody else. This causes scramblings and fights. But there is that other wish in us which does its work in the depths of the social being. It is the wish for the welfare of the society. It transcends the limits of the present and the personal. It is on the side of the infinite.

He who is wise tries to harmonise the wishes that seek for self- gratification with the wish for the social good, and only thus can he realise his higher self.

In its finite aspect the self is conscious of its separateness, and there it is ruthless in its attempt to have more distinction than all others. But in its infinite aspect its wish is to gain that harmony which leads to its perfection and not its mere aggrandisement.

The emancipation of our physical nature is in attaining health, of our social being in attaining goodness, and of our self in attaining love. This last is what Buddha describes as extinction--the extinction of selfishness--which is the function of love, and which does not lead to darkness but to illumination. This is the attainment of *bodhi*, or the true awakening; it is the revealing in us of the infinite joy by the light of love.

The passage of our self is through its selfhood, which is independent, to its attainment of soul, which is harmonious. This harmony can never be reached through compulsion. So our will, in the history of its growth, must come through independence and rebellion to the ultimate completion. We must have the possibility of the negative form of freedom, which is licence, before we can attain the positive freedom, which is love.

This negative freedom, the freedom of self-will, can turn its back upon its highest realisation, but it cannot cut itself away from it altogether, for then it

will lose its own meaning. Our self-will has freedom up to a certain extent; it can know what it is to break away from the path, but it cannot continue in that direction indefinitely. For we are finite on our negative side. We must come to an end in our evil doing, in our career of discord. For evil is not infinite, and discord cannot be an end in itself. Our will has freedom in order that it may find out that its true course is towards goodness and love. For goodness and love are infinite, and only in the infinite is the perfect realisation of freedom possible. So our will can be free not towards the limitations of our self, not where it is *māyā* and negation, but towards the unlimited, where is truth and love. Our freedom cannot go against its own principle of freedom and yet be free; it cannot commit suicide and yet live. We cannot say that we should have infinite freedom to fetter ourselves, for the fettering ends the freedom.

So in the freedom of our will, we have the same dualism of appearance and truth--our self-will is only the appearance of freedom and love is the truth. When we try to make this appearance independent of truth, then our attempt brings misery and proves its own futility in the end. Everything has this dualism of *māyā* and *satyam*, appearance and truth. Words are *māyā* where they are merely sounds and finite, they are *satyam* where they are ideas and infinite. Our self is *māyā* where it is merely individual and finite, where it considers its separateness as absolute; it is *satyam* where it recognises its essence in the universal and infinite, in the supreme self, in *paramātman*. This is what Christ means when he says, "Before Abraham was I am." This is the eternal *I am* that speaks through the *I am* that is in me. The individual *I am* attains its perfect end when it realises its freedom of harmony in the infinite *I am*. Then is it *mukti*, its deliverance from the thraldom of *māyā*, of appearance, which springs from *avidyā*, from ignorance; its emancipation in *çāntam çivam advaitam*, in the perfect repose in truth, in the perfect activity in goodness, and in the perfect union in love.

Not only in our self but also in nature is there this separateness from God, which has been described as *māyā* by our philosophers, because the separateness does not exist by itself, it does not limit God's infinity from outside. It is his own will that has imposed limits to itself, just as the chess-player restricts his will with regard to the moving of the chessmen. The player willingly enters into definite relations with each particular piece and realises the joy of his power by these very restrictions. It is not that he cannot move the chessmen just as he pleases, but if he does so then there can be no play. If God assumes his rôle of omnipotence, then his creation is at an end and his power loses all its meaning. For power to be a power must act within limits. God's water must be water, his earth can never be other than earth. The law that has made them water and earth is his own law by which he has separated the play from the player, for therein the joy of the player consists.

As by the limits of law nature is separated from God, so it is the limits of its egoism which separates the self from him. He has willingly set limits to his

will, and has given us mastery over the little world of our own. It is like a father's settling upon his son some allowance within the limit of which he is free to do what he likes. Though it remains a portion of the father's own property, yet he frees it from the operation of his own will. The reason of it is that the will, which is love's will and therefore free, can have its joy only in a union with another free will. The tyrant who must have slaves looks upon them as instruments of his purpose. It is the consciousness of his own necessity which makes him crush the will out of them, to make his self-interest absolutely secure. This self-interest cannot brook the least freedom in others, because it is not itself free. The tyrant is really dependent on his slaves, and therefore he tries to make them completely useful by making them subservient to his own will. But a lover must have two wills for the realisation of his love, because the consummation of love is in harmony, the harmony between freedom and freedom. So God's love from which our self has taken form has made it separate from God; and it is God's love which again establishes a reconciliation and unites God with our self through the separation. That is why our self has to go through endless renewals. For in its career of separateness it cannot go on for ever. Separateness is the finitude where it finds its barriers to come back again and again to its infinite source. Our self has ceaselessly to cast off its age, repeatedly shed its limits in oblivion and death, in order to realise its immortal youth. Its personality must merge in the universal time after time, in fact pass through it every moment, ever to refresh its individual life. It must follow the eternal rhythm and touch the fundamental unity at every step, and thus maintain its separation balanced in beauty and strength.

The play of life and death we see everywhere--this transmutation of the old into the new. The day comes to us every morning, naked and white, fresh as a flower. But we know it is old. It is age itself. It is that very ancient day which took up the newborn earth in its arms, covered it with its white mantle of light, and sent it forth on its pilgrimage among the stars.

Yet its feet are untired and its eyes undimmed. It carries the golden amulet of ageless eternity, at whose touch all wrinkles vanish from the forehead of creation. In the very core of the world's heart stands immortal youth. Death and decay cast over its face momentary shadows and pass on; they leave no marks of their steps--and truth remains fresh and young.

This old, old day of our earth is born again and again every morning. It comes back to the original refrain of its music. If its march were the march of an infinite straight line, if it had not the awful pause of its plunge in the abysmal darkness and its repeated rebirth in the life of the endless beginning, then it would gradually soil and bury truth with its dust and spread ceaseless aching over the earth under its heavy tread. Then every moment would leave its load of weariness behind, and decrepitude would reign supreme on its throne of eternal dirt.

But every morning the day is reborn among the newly-blossomed flowers with the same message retold and the same assurance renewed that death eternally dies, that the waves of turmoil are on the surface, and that the sea of tranquillity is fathomless. The curtain of night is drawn aside and truth emerges without a speck of dust on its garment, without a furrow of age on its lineaments.

We see that he who is before everything else is the same to-day. Every note of the song of creation comes fresh from his voice. The universe is not a mere echo, reverberating from sky to sky, like a homeless wanderer--the echo of an old song sung once for all in the dim beginning of things and then left orphaned. Every moment it comes from the heart of the master, it is breathed in his breath.

And that is the reason why it overspreads the sky like a thought taking shape in a poem, and never has to break into pieces with the burden of its own accumulating weight. Hence the surprise of endless variations, the advent of the unaccountable, the ceaseless procession of individuals, each of whom is without a parallel in creation. As at the first so to the last, the beginning never ends--the world is ever old and ever new.

It is for our self to know that it must be born anew every moment of its life. It must break through all illusions that encase it in their crust to make it appear old, burdening it with death.

For life is immortal youthfulness, and it hates age that tries to clog its movements--age that belongs not to life in truth, but follows it as the shadow follows the lamp.

Our life, like a river, strikes its banks not to find itself closed in by them, but to realise anew every moment that it has its unending opening towards the sea. It is a poem that strikes its metre at every step not to be silenced by its rigid regulations, but to give expression every moment to the inner freedom of its harmony.

The boundary walls of our individuality thrust us back within our limits, on the one hand, and thus lead us, on the other, to the unlimited. Only when we try to make these limits infinite are we launched into an impossible contradiction and court miserable failure.

This is the cause which leads to the great revolutions in human history. Whenever the part, spurning the whole, tries to run a separate course of its own, the great pull of the all gives it a violent wrench, stops it suddenly, and brings it to the dust. Whenever the individual tries to dam the ever-flowing current of the world-force and imprison it within the area of his particular use, it brings on disaster. However powerful a king may be, he cannot raise his

standard or rebellion against the infinite source of strength, which is unity, and yet remain powerful.

It has been said, *By unrighteousness men prosper, gain what they desire, and triumph over their enemies, but at the end they are cut off at the root and suffer extinction.* 38 Our roots must go deep down into the universal if we would attain the greatness of personality.

It is the end of our self to seek that union. It must bend its head low in love and meekness and take its stand where great and small all meet. It has to gain by its loss and rise by its surrender. His games would be a horror to the child if he could not come back to his mother, and our pride of personality will be a curse to us if we cannot give it up in love. We must know that it is only the revelation of the Infinite which is endlessly new and eternally beautiful in us, and which gives the only meaning to our self.

Footnotes

35 "Svābhāvikī jnāna bala kriyācha."

36 Ānandādhyēva khalvimāni bhūtāni jāyantē, ānandēna jātāni jīvanti, ānandamprayantyabhisamviçanti.

37 Ānandarūpamamritam yadvibhāti.

38 Adharmēnaidhatē tāvat tatō bahdrāņi paçyati tatah sapatnān jayati samūlastu vinaçyati.

VI

REALISATION IN ACTION

It is only those who have known that joy expresses itself through law who have learnt to transcend the law. Not that the bonds of law have ceased to exist for them--but that the bonds have become to them as the form of freedom incarnate. The freed soul delights in accepting bonds, and does not seek to evade any of them, for in each does it feel the manifestation of an infinite energy whose joy is in creation.

As a matter of fact, where there are no bonds, where there is the madness of license, the soul ceases to be free. There is its hurt; there is its separation from the infinite, its agony of sin. Whenever at the call of temptation the soul falls away from the bondage of law, then, like a child deprived of the support of its

mother's arms, it cries out, *Smite me not!* [42] "Bind me," it prays, "oh, bind me in the bonds of thy law; bind me within and without; hold me tight; let me in the clasp of thy law be bound up together with thy joy; protect me by thy firm hold from the deadly laxity of sin."

As some, under the idea that law is the opposite of joy, mistake intoxication for joy, so there are many in our country who imagine action to be opposed to freedom. They think that activity being in the material plane is a restriction of the free spirit of the soul. But we must remember that as joy expresses itself in law, so the soul finds its freedom in action. It is because joy cannot find expression in itself alone that it desires the law which is outside. Likewise it is because the soul cannot find freedom within itself that it wants external action. The soul of man is ever freeing itself from its own folds by its activity; had it been otherwise it could not have done any voluntary work.

The more man acts and makes actual what was latent in him, the nearer does he bring the distant Yet-to-be. In that actualisation man is ever making himself more and yet more distinct, and seeing himself clearly under newer and newer aspects in the midst of his varied activities, in the state, in society. This vision makes for freedom.

Freedom is not in darkness, nor in vagueness. There is no bondage so fearful as that of obscurity. It is to escape from this obscurity that the seed struggles to sprout, the bud to blossom. It is to rid itself of this envelope of vagueness that the ideas in our mind are constantly seeking opportunities to take on outward form. In the same way our soul, in order to release itself from the mist of indistinctness and come out into the open, is continually creating for itself fresh fields of action, and is busy contriving new forms of activity, even such as are not needful for the purposes of its earthly life. And why? Because it wants freedom. It wants to see itself, to realise itself.

When man cuts down the pestilential jungle and makes unto himself a garden, the beauty that he thus sets free from within its enclosure of ugliness is the beauty of his own soul: without giving it this freedom outside, he cannot make it free within. When he implants law and order in the midst of the waywardness of society, the good which he sets free from the obstruction of the bad is the goodness of his own soul: without being thus made free outside it cannot find freedom within. Thus is man continually engaged in setting free in action his powers, his beauty, his goodness, his very soul. And the more he succeeds in so doing, the greater does he see himself to be, the broader becomes the field of his knowledge of self.

The Upanishad says: *In the midst of activity alone wilt thou desire to live a hundred years.* [43] It is the saying of those who had amply tasted of the joy of the soul. Those who have fully realised the soul have never talked in mournful accents of the sorrowfulness of life or of the bondage of action. They are not

like the weakling flower whose stem-hold is so light that it drops away before attaining fruition. They hold on to life with all their might and say, "never will we let go till the fruit is ripe." They desire in their joy to express themselves strenuously in their life and in their work. Pain and sorrow dismay them not, they are not bowed down to the dust by the weight of their own heart. With the erect head of the victorious hero they march through life seeing themselves and showing themselves in increasing resplendence of soul through both joys and sorrows. The joy of their life keeps step with the joy of that energy which is playing at building and breaking throughout the universe. The joy of the sunlight, the joy of the free air, mingling with the joy of their lives, makes one sweet harmony reign within and without. It is they who say, *In the midst of activity alone wilt thou desire to live a hundred years.*

This joy of life, this joy of work, in man is absolutely true. It is no use saying that it is a delusion of ours; that unless we cast it away we cannot enter upon the path of self-realisation. It will never do the least good to attempt the realisation of the infinite apart from the world of action.

It is not the truth that man is active on compulsion. If there is compulsion on one side, on the other there is pleasure; on the one hand action is spurred on by want, on the other it hies to its natural fulfilment. That is why, as man's civilisation advances, he increases his obligations and the work that he willingly creates for himself. One should have thought that nature had given him quite enough to do to keep him busy, in fact that it was working him to death with the lash of hunger and thirst,--but no. Man does not think that sufficient; he cannot rest content with only doing the work that nature prescribes for him in common with the birds and beasts. He needs must surpass all, even in activity. No creature has to work so hard as man; he has been impelled to contrive for himself a vast field of action in society; and in this field he is for every building up and pulling down, making and unmaking laws, piling up heaps of material, and incessantly thinking, seeking and suffering. In this field he has fought his mightiest battles, gained continual new life, made death glorious, and, far from evading troubles, has willingly and continually taken up the burden of fresh trouble. He has discovered the truth that he is not complete in the cage of his immediate surroundings, that he is greater than his present, and that while to stand still in one place may be comforting, the arrest of life destroys his true function and the real purpose of his existence.

This *mahatī vinashtih--this great destruction* he cannot bear, and accordingly he toils and suffers in order that he may gain in stature by transcending his present, in order to become that which he yet is not. In this travail is man's glory, and it is because he knows it, that he has not sought to circumscribe his field of action, but is constantly occupied in extending the bounds. Sometimes he wanders so far that his work tends to lose its meaning, and his rushings to and fro create fearful eddies round different centres--eddies of self-interest, of

pride of power. Still, so long as the strength of the current is not lost, there is no fear; the obstructions and the dead accumulations of his activity are dissipated and carried away; the impetus corrects its own mistakes. Only when the soul sleeps in stagnation do its enemies gain overmastering strength, and these obstructions become too clogging to be fought through. Hence have we been warned by our teachers that to work we must live, to live we must work; that life and activity are inseparably connected.

It is very characteristic of life that it is not complete within itself; it must come out. Its truth is in the commerce of the inside and the outside. In order to live, the body must maintain its various relations with the outside light and air--not only to gain life-force, but also to manifest it. Consider how fully employed the body is with its own inside activities; its heart- beat must not stop for a second, its stomach, its brain, must be ceaselessly working. Yet this is not enough; the body is outwardly restless all the while. Its life leads it to an endless dance of work and play outside; it cannot be satisfied with the circulations of its internal economy, and only finds the fulfilment of joy in its outward excursions.

The same with the soul. It cannot live on its own internal feelings and imaginings. It is ever in need of external objects; not only to feed its inner consciousness but to apply itself in action, not only to receive but also to give.

The real truth is, we cannot live if we divide him who is truth itself into two parts. We must abide in him within as well as without. In whichever aspect we deny him we deceive ourselves and incur a loss. *Brahma has not left me, let me not leave Brahma.* 44 If we say that we would realise him in introspection alone and leave him out of our external activity, that we would enjoy him by the love in our heart, but not worship him by outward ministrations; or if we say the opposite, and overweight ourselves on one side in the journey of our life's quest, we shall alike totter to our downfall.

In the great western continent we see that the soul of man is mainly concerned with extending itself outwards; the open field of the exercise of power is its field. Its partiality is entirely for the world of extension, and it would leave aside-- nay, hardly believe in--that field of inner consciousness which is the field of fulfilment. It has gone so far in this that the perfection of fulfilment seems to exist for it nowhere. Its science has always talked of the never-ending evolution of the world. Its metaphysic has now begun to talk of the evolution of God himself. They will not admit that he *is*; they would have it that he also is *becoming.*

They fail to realise that while the infinite is always greater than any assignable limit, it is also complete; that on the one hand Brahma is evolving, on the other he is perfection; that in the one aspect he is essence, in the other manifestation--both together at the same time, as is the song and the act of singing. This is like ignoring the consciousness of the singer and saying that

only the singing is in progress, that there is no song. Doubtless we are directly aware only of the singing, and never at any one time of the song as a whole; but do we not all the time know that the complete song is in the soul of the singer?

It is because of this insistence on the doing and the becoming that we perceive in the west the intoxication of power. These men seem to have determined to despoil and grasp everything by force. They would always obstinately be doing and never be done-- they would not allow to death its natural place in the scheme of things--they know not the beauty of completion.

In our country the danger comes from the opposite side. Our partiality is for the internal world. We would cast aside with contumely the field of power and of extension. We would realise Brahma in mediation only in his aspect of completeness, we have determined not to see him in the commerce of the universe in his aspect of evolution. That is why in our seekers we so often find the intoxication of the spirit and its consequent degradation. Their faith would acknowledge no bondage of law, their imagination soars unrestricted, their conduct disdains to offer any explanation to reason. Their intellect, in its vain attempts to see Brahma inseparable from his creation, works itself stone- dry, and their heart, seeking to confine him within its own outpourings, swoons in a drunken ecstasy of emotion. They have not even kept within reach any standard whereby they can measure the loss of strength and character which manhood sustains by thus ignoring the bonds of law and the claims of action in the external universe.

But true spirituality, as taught in our sacred lore, is calmly balanced in strength, in the correlation of the within and the without. The truth has its law, it has its joy. On one side of it is being chanted the *Bhayādasyāgnistapati* [45] , on the other the *Ānandādhyeva khalvimāni bhūtāni jāyante.* [46] Freedom is impossible of attainment without submission to law, for Brahma is in one aspect bound by his truth, in the other free in his joy.

As for ourselves, it is only when we wholly submit to the bonds of truth that we fully gain the joy of freedom. And how? As does the string that is bound to the harp. When the harp is truly strung, when there is not the slightest laxity in the strength of the bond, then only does music result; and the string transcending itself in its melody finds at every chord its true freedom. It is because it is bound by such hard and fast rules on the one side that it can find this range of freedom in music on the other. While the string was not true, it was indeed merely bound; but a loosening of its bondage would not have been the way to freedom, which it can only fully achieve by being bound tighter and tighter till it has attained the true pitch.

The bass and treble strings of our duty are only bonds so long as we cannot maintain them steadfastly attuned according to the law of truth; and we cannot

call by the name of freedom the loosening of them into the nothingness of inaction. That is why I would say that the true striving in the quest of truth, of *dharma*, consists not in the neglect of action but in the effort to attune it closer and closer to the eternal harmony. The text of this striving should be, *Whatever works thou doest, consecrate them to Brahma.* 47 That is to say, the soul is to dedicate itself to Brahma through all its activities. This dedication is the song of the soul, in this is its freedom. Joy reigns when all work becomes the path to the union with Brahma; when the soul ceases to return constantly to its own desires; when in it our self- offering grows more and more intense. Then there is completion, then there is freedom, then, in this world, comes the kingdom of God.

Who is there that, sitting in his corner, would deride this grand self-expression of humanity in action, this incessant self- consecration? Who is there that thinks the union of God and man is to be found in some secluded enjoyment of his own imaginings, away from the sky-towering temple of the greatness of humanity, which the whole of mankind, in sunshine and storm, is toiling to erect through the ages? Who is there that thinks this secluded communion is the highest form of religion?

O thou distraught wanderer, thou *Sannyasin*, drunk in the wine of self-intoxication, dost thou not already hear the progress of the human soul along the highway traversing the wide fields of humanity--the thunder of its progress in the car of its achievements, which is destined to overpass the bounds that prevent its expansion into the universe? The very mountains are cleft asunder and give way before the march of its banners waving triumphantly in the heavens; as the mist before the rising sun, the tangled obscurities of material things vanish at its irresistible approach. Pain, disease, and disorder are at every step receding before its onset; the obstructions of ignorance are being thrust aside; the darkness of blindness is being pierced through; and behold, the promised land of wealth and health, of poetry and art, of knowledge and righteousness is gradually being revealed to view. Do you in your lethargy desire to say that this car of humanity, which is shaking the very earth with the triumph of its progress along the mighty vistas of history, has no charioteer leading it on to its fulfilment? Who is there who refuses to respond to his call to join in this triumphal progress? Who so foolish as to run away from the gladsome throng and seek him in the listlessness of inaction? Who so steeped in untruth as to dare to call all this untrue--this great world of men, this civilisation of expanding humanity, this eternal effort of man, through depths of sorrow, through heights of gladness, through innumerable impediments within and without, to win victory for his powers? He who can think of this immensity of achievement as an immense fraud, can he truly believe in God who is the truth? He who thinks to reach God by running away from the world, when and where does he expect to meet him? How far can he fly--can he fly and fly, till he flies into nothingness itself? No, the coward who would fly can

nowhere find him. We must be brave enough to be able to say: We are reaching him here in this very spot, now at this very moment. We must be able to assure ourselves that as in our actions we are realising ourselves, so in ourselves we are realising him who is the self of self. We must earn the right to say so unhesitatingly by clearing away with our own effort all obstruction, all disorder, all discords from our path of activity; we must be able to say, "In my work is my joy, and in that joy does the joy of my joy abide."

Whom does the Upanishad call *The chief among the knowers of Brahma?* [48] He is defined as *He whose joy is in Brahma, whose play is in Brahma, the active one.* [49] Joy without the play of joy is no joy at all--play without activity is no play. Activity is the play of joy. He whose joy is in Brahma, how can he live in inaction? For must he not by his activity provide that in which the joy of Brahma is to take form and manifest itself? That is why he who knows Brahma, who has his joy in Brahma, must also have all his activity in Brahma--his eating and drinking, his earning of livelihood and his beneficence. Just as the joy of the poet in his poem, of the artist in his art, of the brave man in the output of his courage, of the wise man in his discernment of truths, ever seeks expression in their several activities, so the joy of the knower of Brahma, in the whole of his everyday work, little and big, in truth, in beauty, in orderliness and in beneficence, seeks to give expression to the infinite.

Brahma himself gives expression to his joy in just the same way. *By his many-sided activity, which radiates in all directions, does he fulfil the inherent want of his different creatures.* [50] That inherent want is he himself, and so he is in so many ways, in so many forms, giving himself. He works, for without working how could he give himself. His joy is ever dedicating itself in the dedication which is his creation.

In this very thing does our own true meaning lie, in this is our likeness to our father. We must also give up ourselves in many- sided variously aimed activity. In the Vedas he is called *the giver of himself, the giver of strength.* [51] He is not content with giving us himself, but he gives us strength that we may likewise give ourselves. That is why the seer of the Upanishad prays to him who is thus fulfilling our wants, *May he grant us the beneficent mind* [52] , may he fulfil that uttermost want of ours by granting us the beneficent mind. That is to say, it is not enough he should alone work to remove our want, but he should give us the desire and the strength to work with him in his activity and in the exercise of the goodness. Then, indeed, will our union with him alone be accomplished. The beneficent mind is that which shows us the want (*swārtha*) of another self to be the inherent want (*nihitārtha*) of our own self; that which shows that our joy consists in the varied aiming of our many-sided powers in the work of humanity. When we work under the guidance of this beneficent mind, then our activity is regulated, but does not become mechanical; it is action not goaded on by want, but stimulated by the satisfaction of the soul. Such activity ceases to be a blind imitation of that of the multitude, a cowardly

following of the dictates of fashion. Therein we begin to see that *He is in the beginning and in the end of the universe* [53] , and likewise see that of our own work is he the fount and the inspiration, and at the end thereof is he, and therefore that all our activity is pervaded by peace and good and joy.

The Upanishad says: *Knowledge, power, and action are of his nature.* [54] It is because this naturalness has not yet been born in us that we tend to divide joy from work. Our day of work is not our day of joy-- for that we require a holiday; for, miserable that we are, we cannot find our holiday in our work. The river finds its holiday in its onward flow, the fire in its outburst of flame, the scent of the flower in its permeation of the atmosphere; but in our everyday work there is no such holiday for us. It is because we do not let ourselves go, because we do not give ourselves joyously and entirely up to it, that our work overpowers us.

O giver of thyself! at the vision of thee as joy let our souls flame up to thee as the fire, flow on to thee as the river, permeate thy being as the fragrance of the flower. Give us strength to love, to love fully, our life in its joys and sorrows, in its gains and losses, in its rise and fall. Let us have strength enough fully to see and hear thy universe, and to work with full vigour therein. Let us fully live the life thou hast given us, let us bravely take and bravely give. This is our prayer to thee. Let us once for all dislodge from our minds the feeble fancy that would make out thy joy to be a thing apart from action, thin, formless, and unsustained. Wherever the peasant tills the hard earth, there does thy joy gush out in the green of the corn, wherever man displaces the entangled forest, smooths the stony ground, and clears for himself a homestead, there does thy joy enfold it in orderliness and peace.

O worker of the universe! We would pray to thee to let the irresistible current of thy universal energy come like the impetuous south wind of spring, let it come rushing over the vast field of the life of man, let it bring the scent of many flowers, the murmurings of many woodlands, let it make sweet and vocal the lifelessness of our dried-up soul-life. Let our newly awakened powers cry out for unlimited fulfilment in leaf and flower and fruit.

Footnotes

[42] **Mā mā himsīh.**

[43] **Kurvannēvēha karmāni jijīvishet çatam samāh.**

[44] **Māham brahma nirākuryyām mā mā brahma nirākarōt.**

[45] **"For fear of him the fire doth burn," etc**

46 "From Joy are born all created things," etc.

47 Yadyat karma prakurvīta tadbrahmani samarpayet.

48 Brahmavidāmvaristhah.

49 Ātmakrīrha ātmaratih kriyāvān.

50 Bahudhā çakti yogāt varņānanekān nihitārtho dadhāti.

51 Ātmadā baladā.

52 Sa no buddhya çubhayā samyunaktu.

53 Vichaiti chāntē viçvamādau.

54 Svābhāvikījnāna bala kriyā cha.

VI

REALISATION IN ACTION

It is only those who have known that joy expresses itself through law who have learnt to transcend the law. Not that the bonds of law have ceased to exist for them--but that the bonds have become to them as the form of freedom incarnate. The freed soul delights in accepting bonds, and does not seek to evade any of them, for in each does it feel the manifestation of an infinite energy whose joy is in creation.

As a matter of fact, where there are no bonds, where there is the madness of license, the soul ceases to be free. There is its hurt; there is its separation from the infinite, its agony of sin. Whenever at the call of temptation the soul falls away from the bondage of law, then, like a child deprived of the support of its mother's arms, it cries out, *Smite me not!* 42 "Bind me," it prays, "oh, bind me in the bonds of thy law; bind me within and without; hold me tight; let me in the clasp of thy law be bound up together with thy joy; protect me by thy firm hold from the deadly laxity of sin."

As some, under the idea that law is the opposite of joy, mistake intoxication for joy, so there are many in our country who imagine action to be opposed to freedom. They think that activity being in the material plane is a restriction of the free spirit of the soul. But we must remember that as joy expresses itself in law, so the soul finds its freedom in action. It is because joy cannot find expression in itself alone that it desires the law which is outside. Likewise it is because the soul cannot find freedom within itself that it wants external action.

The soul of man is ever freeing itself from its own folds by its activity; had it been otherwise it could not have done any voluntary work.

The more man acts and makes actual what was latent in him, the nearer does he bring the distant Yet-to-be. In that actualisation man is ever making himself more and yet more distinct, and seeing himself clearly under newer and newer aspects in the midst of his varied activities, in the state, in society. This vision makes for freedom.

Freedom is not in darkness, nor in vagueness. There is no bondage so fearful as that of obscurity. It is to escape from this obscurity that the seed struggles to sprout, the bud to blossom. It is to rid itself of this envelope of vagueness that the ideas in our mind are constantly seeking opportunities to take on outward form. In the same way our soul, in order to release itself from the mist of indistinctness and come out into the open, is continually creating for itself fresh fields of action, and is busy contriving new forms of activity, even such as are not needful for the purposes of its earthly life. And why? Because it wants freedom. It wants to see itself, to realise itself.

When man cuts down the pestilential jungle and makes unto himself a garden, the beauty that he thus sets free from within its enclosure of ugliness is the beauty of his own soul: without giving it this freedom outside, he cannot make it free within. When he implants law and order in the midst of the waywardness of society, the good which he sets free from the obstruction of the bad is the goodness of his own soul: without being thus made free outside it cannot find freedom within. Thus is man continually engaged in setting free in action his powers, his beauty, his goodness, his very soul. And the more he succeeds in so doing, the greater does he see himself to be, the broader becomes the field of his knowledge of self.

The Upanishad says: *In the midst of activity alone wilt thou desire to live a hundred years.* [43] It is the saying of those who had amply tasted of the joy of the soul. Those who have fully realised the soul have never talked in mournful accents of the sorrowfulness of life or of the bondage of action. They are not like the weakling flower whose stem-hold is so light that it drops away before attaining fruition. They hold on to life with all their might and say, "never will we let go till the fruit is ripe." They desire in their joy to express themselves strenuously in their life and in their work. Pain and sorrow dismay them not, they are not bowed down to the dust by the weight of their own heart. With the erect head of the victorious hero they march through life seeing themselves and showing themselves in increasing resplendence of soul through both joys and sorrows. The joy of their life keeps step with the joy of that energy which is playing at building and breaking throughout the universe. The joy of the sunlight, the joy of the free air, mingling with the joy of their lives, makes one sweet harmony reign within and without. It is they who say, *In the midst of activity alone wilt thou desire to live a hundred years.*

This joy of life, this joy of work, in man is absolutely true. It is no use saying that it is a delusion of ours; that unless we cast it away we cannot enter upon the path of self-realisation. It will never do the least good to attempt the realisation of the infinite apart from the world of action.

It is not the truth that man is active on compulsion. If there is compulsion on one side, on the other there is pleasure; on the one hand action is spurred on by want, on the other it hies to its natural fulfilment. That is why, as man's civilisation advances, he increases his obligations and the work that he willingly creates for himself. One should have thought that nature had given him quite enough to do to keep him busy, in fact that it was working him to death with the lash of hunger and thirst,--but no. Man does not think that sufficient; he cannot rest content with only doing the work that nature prescribes for him in common with the birds and beasts. He needs must surpass all, even in activity. No creature has to work so hard as man; he has been impelled to contrive for himself a vast field of action in society; and in this field he is for every building up and pulling down, making and unmaking laws, piling up heaps of material, and incessantly thinking, seeking and suffering. In this field he has fought his mightiest battles, gained continual new life, made death glorious, and, far from evading troubles, has willingly and continually taken up the burden of fresh trouble. He has discovered the truth that he is not complete in the cage of his immediate surroundings, that he is greater than his present, and that while to stand still in one place may be comforting, the arrest of life destroys his true function and the real purpose of his existence.

This *mahatī vinashtih--this great destruction* he cannot bear, and accordingly he toils and suffers in order that he may gain in stature by transcending his present, in order to become that which he yet is not. In this travail is man's glory, and it is because he knows it, that he has not sought to circumscribe his field of action, but is constantly occupied in extending the bounds. Sometimes he wanders so far that his work tends to lose its meaning, and his rushings to and fro create fearful eddies round different centres--eddies of self-interest, of pride of power. Still, so long as the strength of the current is not lost, there is no fear; the obstructions and the dead accumulations of his activity are dissipated and carried away; the impetus corrects its own mistakes. Only when the soul sleeps in stagnation do its enemies gain overmastering strength, and these obstructions become too clogging to be fought through. Hence have we been warned by our teachers that to work we must live, to live we must work; that life and activity are inseparably connected.

It is very characteristic of life that it is not complete within itself; it must come out. Its truth is in the commerce of the inside and the outside. In order to live, the body must maintain its various relations with the outside light and air--not only to gain life-force, but also to manifest it. Consider how fully employed the body is with its own inside activities; its heart- beat must not stop for a second,

its stomach, its brain, must be ceaselessly working. Yet this is not enough; the body is outwardly restless all the while. Its life leads it to an endless dance of work and play outside; it cannot be satisfied with the circulations of its internal economy, and only finds the fulfilment of joy in its outward excursions.

The same with the soul. It cannot live on its own internal feelings and imaginings. It is ever in need of external objects; not only to feed its inner consciousness but to apply itself in action, not only to receive but also to give.

The real truth is, we cannot live if we divide him who is truth itself into two parts. We must abide in him within as well as without. In whichever aspect we deny him we deceive ourselves and incur a loss. *Brahma has not left me, let me not leave Brahma.* 44 If we say that we would realise him in introspection alone and leave him out of our external activity, that we would enjoy him by the love in our heart, but not worship him by outward ministrations; or if we say the opposite, and overweight ourselves on one side in the journey of our life's quest, we shall alike totter to our downfall.

In the great western continent we see that the soul of man is mainly concerned with extending itself outwards; the open field of the exercise of power is its field. Its partiality is entirely for the world of extension, and it would leave aside-- nay, hardly believe in--that field of inner consciousness which is the field of fulfilment. It has gone so far in this that the perfection of fulfilment seems to exist for it nowhere. Its science has always talked of the never-ending evolution of the world. Its metaphysic has now begun to talk of the evolution of God himself. They will not admit that he *is*; they would have it that he also is *becoming.*

They fail to realise that while the infinite is always greater than any assignable limit, it is also complete; that on the one hand Brahma is evolving, on the other he is perfection; that in the one aspect he is essence, in the other manifestation--both together at the same time, as is the song and the act of singing. This is like ignoring the consciousness of the singer and saying that only the singing is in progress, that there is no song. Doubtless we are directly aware only of the singing, and never at any one time of the song as a whole; but do we not all the time know that the complete song is in the soul of the singer?

It is because of this insistence on the doing and the becoming that we perceive in the west the intoxication of power. These men seem to have determined to despoil and grasp everything by force. They would always obstinately be doing and never be done-- they would not allow to death its natural place in the scheme of things--they know not the beauty of completion.

In our country the danger comes from the opposite side. Our partiality is for the internal world. We would cast aside with contumely the field of power and

of extension. We would realise Brahma in mediation only in his aspect of completeness, we have determined not to see him in the commerce of the universe in his aspect of evolution. That is why in our seekers we so often find the intoxication of the spirit and its consequent degradation. Their faith would acknowledge no bondage of law, their imagination soars unrestricted, their conduct disdains to offer any explanation to reason. Their intellect, in its vain attempts to see Brahma inseparable from his creation, works itself stone- dry, and their heart, seeking to confine him within its own outpourings, swoons in a drunken ecstasy of emotion. They have not even kept within reach any standard whereby they can measure the loss of strength and character which manhood sustains by thus ignoring the bonds of law and the claims of action in the external universe.

But true spirituality, as taught in our sacred lore, is calmly balanced in strength, in the correlation of the within and the without. The truth has its law, it has its joy. On one side of it is being chanted the *Bhayādasyāgnistapati* [45] , on the other the *Ānandādhyeva khalvimāni bhūtāni jāyante.* [46] Freedom is impossible of attainment without submission to law, for Brahma is in one aspect bound by his truth, in the other free in his joy.

As for ourselves, it is only when we wholly submit to the bonds of truth that we fully gain the joy of freedom. And how? As does the string that is bound to the harp. When the harp is truly strung, when there is not the slightest laxity in the strength of the bond, then only does music result; and the string transcending itself in its melody finds at every chord its true freedom. It is because it is bound by such hard and fast rules on the one side that it can find this range of freedom in music on the other. While the string was not true, it was indeed merely bound; but a loosening of its bondage would not have been the way to freedom, which it can only fully achieve by being bound tighter and tighter till it has attained the true pitch.

The bass and treble strings of our duty are only bonds so long as we cannot maintain them steadfastly attuned according to the law of truth; and we cannot call by the name of freedom the loosening of them into the nothingness of inaction. That is why I would say that the true striving in the quest of truth, of *dharma*, consists not in the neglect of action but in the effort to attune it closer and closer to the eternal harmony. The text of this striving should be, *Whatever works thou doest, consecrate them to Brahma.* [47] That is to say, the soul is to dedicate itself to Brahma through all its activities. This dedication is the song of the soul, in this is its freedom. Joy reigns when all work becomes the path to the union with Brahma; when the soul ceases to return constantly to its own desires; when in it our self- offering grows more and more intense. Then there is completion, then there is freedom, then, in this world, comes the kingdom of God.

Who is there that, sitting in his corner, would deride this grand self-expression of humanity in action, this incessant self- consecration? Who is there that thinks the union of God and man is to be found in some secluded enjoyment of his own imaginings, away from the sky-towering temple of the greatness of humanity, which the whole of mankind, in sunshine and storm, is toiling to erect through the ages? Who is there that thinks this secluded communion is the highest form of religion?

O thou distraught wanderer, thou *Sannyasin*, drunk in the wine of self-intoxication, dost thou not already hear the progress of the human soul along the highway traversing the wide fields of humanity--the thunder of its progress in the car of its achievements, which is destined to overpass the bounds that prevent its expansion into the universe? The very mountains are cleft asunder and give way before the march of its banners waving triumphantly in the heavens; as the mist before the rising sun, the tangled obscurities of material things vanish at its irresistible approach. Pain, disease, and disorder are at every step receding before its onset; the obstructions of ignorance are being thrust aside; the darkness of blindness is being pierced through; and behold, the promised land of wealth and health, of poetry and art, of knowledge and righteousness is gradually being revealed to view. Do you in your lethargy desire to say that this car of humanity, which is shaking the very earth with the triumph of its progress along the mighty vistas of history, has no charioteer leading it on to its fulfilment? Who is there who refuses to respond to his call to join in this triumphal progress? Who so foolish as to run away from the gladsome throng and seek him in the listlessness of inaction? Who so steeped in untruth as to dare to call all this untrue--this great world of men, this civilisation of expanding humanity, this eternal effort of man, through depths of sorrow, through heights of gladness, through innumerable impediments within and without, to win victory for his powers? He who can think of this immensity of achievement as an immense fraud, can he truly believe in God who is the truth? He who thinks to reach God by running away from the world, when and where does he expect to meet him? How far can he fly--can he fly and fly, till he flies into nothingness itself? No, the coward who would fly can nowhere find him. We must be brave enough to be able to say: We are reaching him here in this very spot, now at this very moment. We must be able to assure ourselves that as in our actions we are realising ourselves, so in ourselves we are realising him who is the self of self. We must earn the right to say so unhesitatingly by clearing away with our own effort all obstruction, all disorder, all discords from our path of activity; we must be able to say, "In my work is my joy, and in that joy does the joy of my joy abide."

Whom does the Upanishad call *The chief among the knowers of Brahma?* 48 He is defined as *He whose joy is in Brahma, whose play is in Brahma, the active one.* 49 Joy without the play of joy is no joy at all--play without activity is no play. Activity is the play of joy. He whose joy is in Brahma, how can he

live in inaction? For must he not by his activity provide that in which the joy of Brahma is to take form and manifest itself? That is why he who knows Brahma, who has his joy in Brahma, must also have all his activity in Brahma-- his eating and drinking, his earning of livelihood and his beneficence. Just as the joy of the poet in his poem, of the artist in his art, of the brave man in the output of his courage, of the wise man in his discernment of truths, ever seeks expression in their several activities, so the joy of the knower of Brahma, in the whole of his everyday work, little and big, in truth, in beauty, in orderliness and in beneficence, seeks to give expression to the infinite.

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51 Ātmadā baladā.

52 Sa no buddhya çubhayā samyunaktu.

53 Vichaiti chāntē viçvamādau.

54 Svābhāvikījnāna bala kriyā cha.

VIII

THE REALISATION OF THE INFINITE

The Upanishads say: "Man becomes true if in this life he can apprehend God; if not, it is the greatest calamity for him."

But what is the nature of this attainment of God? It is quite evident that the infinite is not like one object among many, to be definitely classified and kept among our possessions, to be used as an ally specially favouring us in our politics, warfare, money-making, or in social competitions. We cannot put our God in the same list with our summer-houses, motor-cars, or our credit at the bank, as so many people seem to want to do.

We must try to understand the true character of the desire that a man has when his soul longs for his God. Does it consist of his wish to make an addition, however valuable, to his belongings? Emphatically no! It is an endlessly wearisome task, this continual adding to our stores. In fact, when the soul seeks God she seeks her final escape from this incessant gathering and heaping and never coming to an end. It is not an additional object the she seeks, but it is the *nityo 'nityānām*, the permanent in all that is impermanent, the *rasānām rasatamah*, the highest abiding joy unifying all enjoyments. Therefore when the Upanishads teach us to realise everything in Brahma, it is not to seek something extra, not to manufacture something new.

Know everything that there is in the universe as enveloped by God. 55 *Enjoy whatever is given by him and harbour not in your mind the greed for wealth which is not your own.* 56

When you know that whatever there is is filled by him and whatever you have is his gift, then you realise the infinite in the finite, and the giver in the gifts. Then you know that all the facts of the reality have their only meaning in the manifestation of the one truth, and all your possessions have their only significance for you, not in themselves but in the relation they establish with the infinite.

So it cannot be said that we can find Brahma as we find other objects; there is no question of searching from him in one thing in preference to another, in

one place instead of somewhere else. We do not have to run to the grocer's shop for our morning light; we open our eyes and there it is; so we need only give ourselves up to find that Brahma is everywhere.

This is the reason why Buddha admonished us to free ourselves from the confinement of the life of the self. If there were nothing else to take its place more positively perfect and satisfying, then such admonition would be absolutely unmeaning. No man can seriously consider the advice, much less have any enthusiasm for it, of surrendering everything one has for gaining nothing whatever.

So our daily worship of God is not really the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service, in goodness and in love.

The Upanishads say: *Be lost altogether in Brahma like an arrow that has completely penetrated its target.* Thus to be conscious of being absolutely enveloped by Brahma is not an act of mere concentration of mind. It must be the aim of the whole of our life. In all our thoughts and deeds we must be conscious of the infinite. Let the realisation of this truth become easier every day of our life, that *none could live or move if the energy of the all-pervading joy did not fill the sky.* 57 In all our actions let us feel that impetus of the infinite energy and be glad.

It may be said that the infinite is beyond our attainment, so it is for us as if it were naught. Yes, if the word attainment implies any idea of possession, then it must be admitted that the infinite is unattainable. But we must keep in mind that the highest enjoyment of man is not in the having but in a getting, which is at the same time not getting. Our physical pleasures leave no margin for the unrealised. They, like the dead satellite of the earth, have but little atmosphere around them. When we take food and satisfy our hunger it is a complete act of possession. So long as the hunger is not satisfied it is a pleasure to eat. For then our enjoyment of eating touches at every point the infinite. But, when it attains completion, or in other words, when our desire for eating reaches the end of the stage of its non-realisation, it reaches the end of its pleasure. In all our intellectual pleasures the margin is broader, the limit is far off. In all our deeper love getting and non-getting run ever parallel. In one of our Vaishnava lyrics the lover says to his beloved: "I feel as if I have gazed upon the beauty of thy face from my birth, yet my eyes are hungry still: as if I have kept thee pressed to my heart for millions of years, yet my heart is not satisfied."

This makes it clear that it is really the infinite whom we seek in our pleasures. Our desire for being wealthy is not a desire for a particular sum of money but it is indefinite, and the most fleeting of our enjoyments are but the momentary touches of the eternal. The tragedy of human life consists in our vain attempts

to stretch the limits of things which can never become unlimited,--to reach the infinite by absurdly adding to the rungs of the ladder of the finite.

It is evident from this that the real desire of our soul is to get beyond all our possessions. Surrounded by things she can touch and feel, she cries, "I am weary of getting; ah, where is he who is never to be got?"

We see everywhere in the history of man that the spirit of renunciation is the deepest reality of the human soul. When the soul says of anything, "I do not want it, for I am above it," she gives utterance to the highest truth that is in her. When a girl's life outgrows her doll, when she realises that in every respect she is more than her doll is, then she throws it away. By the very act of possession we know that we are greater than the things we possess. It is a perfect misery to be kept bound up with things lesser than ourselves. This it is that Maitreyī felt when her husband gave her his property on the eve of leaving home. She asked him, "Would these material things help one to attain the highest?"--or, in other words, "Are they more than my soul to me?" When her husband answered, "They will make you rich in worldly possessions," she said at once, "then what am I to do with these?" It is only when a man truly realises what his possessions are that he has no more illusions about them; then he knows his soul is far above these things and he becomes free from their bondage. Thus man truly realises his soul by outgrowing his possessions, and man's progress in the path of eternal life is through a series of renunciations.

That we cannot absolutely possess the infinite being is not a mere intellectual proposition. It has to be experienced, and this experience is bliss. The bird, while taking its flight in the sky, experiences at every beat of its wings that the sky is boundless, that its wings can never carry it beyond. Therein lies its joy. In the cage the sky is limited; it may be quite enough for all the purposes of the bird's life, only it is not more than is necessary. The bird cannot rejoice within the limits of the necessary. It must feel that what it has is immeasurably more than it ever can want or comprehend, and then only can it be glad.

Thus our soul must soar in the infinite, and she must feel every moment that in the sense of not being able to come to the end of her attainment is her supreme joy, her final freedom.

Man's abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to what is greater than himself, to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God. They make it easier for him to part with all that he has, not expecting his life. His existence is miserable and sordid till he finds some great idea which can truly claim his all, which can release him from all attachment to his belongings. Buddha and Jesus, and all our great prophets, represent such great ideas. They hold before us opportunities for surrendering our all. When they bring forth their divine alms-

bowl we feel we cannot help giving, and we find that in giving is our truest joy and liberation, for it is uniting ourselves to that extent with the infinite.

Man is not complete; he is yet to be. In what he *is* he is small, and if we could conceive him stopping there for eternity we should have an idea of the most awful hell that man can imagine. In his *to be* he is infinite, there is his heaven, his deliverance. His *is* is occupied every moment with what it can get and have done with; his *to be* is hungering for something which is more than can be got, which he never can lose because he never has possessed.

The finite pole of our existence has its place in the world of necessity. There man goes about searching for food to live, clothing to get warmth. In this region--the region of nature--it is his function to get things. The natural man is occupied with enlarging his possessions.

But this act of getting is partial. It is limited to man's necessities. We can have a thing only to the extent of our requirements, just as a vessel can contain water only to the extent of its emptiness. Our relation to food is only in feeding, our relation to a house is only in habitation. We call it a benefit when a thing is fitted only to some particular want of ours. Thus to get is always to get partially, and it never can be otherwise. So this craving for acquisition belongs to our finite self.

But that side of our existence whose direction is towards the infinite seeks not wealth, but freedom and joy. There the reign of necessity ceases, and there our function is not to get but to be. To be what? To be one with Brahma. For the region of the infinite is the region of unity. Therefore the Upanishads say: *If man apprehends God he becomes true.* Here it is becoming, it is not having more. Words do no gather bulk when you know their meaning; they become true by being one with the idea.

Though the West has accepted as its teacher him who boldly proclaimed his oneness with his Father, and who exhorted his followers to be perfect as God, it has never been reconciled to this idea of our unity with the infinite being. It condemns, as a piece of blasphemy, any implication of man's becoming God. This is certainly not the idea that Christ preached, nor perhaps the idea of the Christian mystics, but this seems to be the idea that has become popular in the Christian west.

But the highest wisdom in the East holds that it is not the function of our soul to *gain* God, to utilise him for any special material purpose. All that we can ever aspire to is to become more and more one with God. In the region of nature, which is the region of diversity, we grow by acquisition; in the spiritual world, which is the region of unity, we grow by losing ourselves, by uniting. Gaining a thing, as we have said, is by its nature partial, it is limited only to a particular want; but *being* is complete, it belongs to our wholeness, it springs

not from any necessity but from our affinity with the infinite, which is the principle of perfection that we have in our soul.

Yes, we must become Brahma. We must not shrink to avow this. Our existence is meaningless if we never can expect to realise the highest perfection that there is. If we have an aim and yet can never reach it, then it is no aim at all.

But can it then be said that there is no difference between Brahma and our individual soul? Of course the difference is obvious. Call it illusion or ignorance, or whatever name you may give it, it is there. You can offer explanations but you cannot explain it away. Even illusion is true an illusion.

Brahma is Brahma, he is the infinite ideal of perfection. But we are not what we truly are; we are ever to become true, ever to become Brahma. There is the eternal play of love in the relation between this being and the becoming; and in the depth of this mystery is the source of all truth and beauty that sustains the endless march of creation.

In the music of the rushing stream sounds the joyful assurance, "I shall become the sea." It is not a vain assumption; it is true humility, for it is the truth. The river has no other alternative. On both sides of its banks it has numerous fields and forests, villages and towns; it can serve them in various ways, cleanse them and feed them, carry their produce from place to place. But it can have only partial relations with these, and however long it may linger among them it remains separate; it never can become a town or a forest.

But it can and does become the sea. The lesser moving water has its affinity with the great motionless water of the ocean. It moves through the thousand objects on its onward course, and its motion finds its finality when it reaches the sea.

The river can become the sea, but she can never make the sea part and parcel of herself. If, by some chance, she has encircled some broad sheet of water and pretends that she has made the sea a part of herself, we at once know that it is not so, that her current is still seeking rest in the great ocean to which it can never set boundaries.

In the same manner, our soul can only become Brahma as the river can become the sea. Everything else she touches at one of her points, then leaves and moves on, but she never can leave Brahma and move beyond him. Once our soul realises her ultimate object of repose in Brahma, all her movements acquire a purpose. It is this ocean of infinite rest which gives significance to endless activities. It is this perfectness of being that lends to the imperfection of becoming that quality of beauty which finds its expression in all poetry, drama and art.

There must be a complete idea that animates a poem. Every sentence of the poem touches that idea. When the reader realises that pervading idea, as he reads on, then the reading of the poem is full of joy to him. Then every part of the poem becomes radiantly significant by the light of the whole. But if the poem goes on interminably, never expressing the idea of the whole, only throwing off disconnected images, however beautiful, it becomes wearisome and unprofitable in the extreme. The progress of our soul is like a perfect poem. It has an infinite idea which once realised makes all movements full of meaning and joy. But if we detach its movements from that ultimate idea, if we do not see the infinite rest and only see the infinite motion, then existence appears to us a monstrous evil, impetuously rushing towards an unending aimlessness.

I remember in our childhood we had a teacher who used to make us learn by heart the whole book of Sanskrit grammer, which is written in symbols, without explaining their meaning to us. Day after day we went toiling on, but on towards what, we had not the least notion. So, as regards our lessons, we were in the position of the pessimist who only counts the breathless activities of the world, but cannot see the infinite repose of the perfection whence these activities are gaining their equilibrium every moment in absolute fitness and harmony. We lose all joy in thus contemplating existence, because we miss the truth. We see the gesticulations of the dancer, and we imagine these are directed by a ruthless tyranny of chance, while we are deaf to the eternal music which makes every one of these gestures inevitably spontaneous and beautiful. These motions are ever growing into that music of perfection, becoming one with it, dedicating to that melody at every step the multitudinous forms they go on creating.

And this is the truth of our soul, and this is her joy, that she must ever be growing into Brahma, that all her movements should be modulated by this ultimate idea, and all her creations should be given as offerings to the supreme spirit of perfection.

There is a remarkable saying in the Upanishads: *I think not that I know him well, or that I know him, or even that I know him not.* 58

By the process of knowledge we can never know the infinite being. But if he is altogether beyond our reach, then he is absolutely nothing to us. The truth is that we know him not, yet we know him.

This has been explained in another saying of the Upanishads: *From Brahma words come back baffled, as well as the mind, but he who knows him by the joy of him is free from all fears.* 59

Knowledge is partial, because our intellect is an instrument, it is only a part of us, it can give us information about things which can be divided and analysed,

and whose properties can be classified part by part. But Brahma is perfect, and knowledge which is partial can never be a knowledge of him.

But he can be known by joy, by love. For joy is knowledge in its completeness, it is knowing by our whole being. Intellect sets us apart from the things to be known, but love knows its object by fusion. Such knowledge is immediate and admits no doubt. It is the same as knowing our own selves, only more so.

Therefore, as the Upanishads say, mind can never know Brahma, words can never describe him; he can only be known by our soul, by her joy in him, by her love. Or, in other words, we can only come into relation with him by union--union of our whole being. We must be one with our Father, we must be perfect as he is.

But how can that be? There can be no grade in infinite perfection. We cannot grow more and more into Brahma. He is the absolute one, and there can be no more or less in him.

Indeed, the realisation of the *paramātman*, the supreme soul, within our *antarātman*, our inner individual soul, is in a state of absolute completion. We cannot think of it as non- existent and depending on our limited powers for its gradual construction. If our relation with the divine were all a thing of our own making, how should we rely on it as true, and how should it lend us support?

Yes, we must know that within us we have that where space and time cease to rule and where the links of evolution are merged in unity. In that everlasting abode of the *ātaman*, the soul, the revelation of the *paramātman*, the supreme soul, is already complete. Therefore the Upanishads say: *He who knows Brahman, the true, the all-conscious, and the infinite as hidden in the depths of the soul, which is the supreme sky (the inner sky of consciousness), enjoys all objects of desire in union with the all-knowing Brahman.* 60

The union is already accomplished. The *paramātman*, the supreme soul, has himself chosen this soul of ours as his bride and the marriage has been completed. The solemn *mantram* has been uttered: *Let thy heart be even as my heart is.* 61 There is no room in this marriage for evolution to act the part of the master of ceremonies. The *eshah*, who cannot otherwise be described than as *This*, the nameless immediate presence, is ever here in our innermost being. "This *eshah*, or *This*, is the supreme end of the other this"; 62 "this *This* is the supreme treasure of the other this"; 63 "this *This* is the supreme dwelling of the other this"; 64 "this *This* is the supreme joy of the other this." 65 Because the marriage of supreme love has been accomplished in timeless time. And now goes on the endless *līlā*, the play of love. He who has been gained in eternity is now being pursued in time and space, in joys and sorrows, in this world and in the worlds beyond. When the soul-bride understands this well, her heart is blissful and at rest. She knows that she, like a river, has attained

the ocean of her fulfilment at one end of her being, and at the other end she is ever attaining it; at one end it is eternal rest and completion, at the other it is incessant movement and change. When she knows both ends as inseparably connected, then she knows the world as her own household by the right of knowing the master of the world as her own lord. Then all her services becomes services of love, all the troubles and tribulations of life come to her as trials triumphantly borne to prove the strength of her love, smilingly to win the wager from her lover. But so long as she remains obstinately in the dark, lifts not her veil, does not recognise her lover, and only knows the world dissociated from him, she serves as a handmaid here, where by right she might reign as a queen; she sways in doubt, and weeps in sorrow and dejection. *She passes from starvation to starvation, from trouble to trouble, and from fear to fear.* 66

I can never forget that scrap of a song I once heard in the early dawn in the midst of the din of the crowd that had collected for a festival the night before: "Ferryman, take me across to the other shore!"

In the bustle of all our work there comes out this cry, "Take me across." The carter in India sings while driving his cart, "Take me across." The itinerant grocer deals out his goods to his customers and sings, "Take me across".

What is the meaning of this cry? We feel we have not reached our goal; and we know with all our striving and toiling we do not come to the end, we do not attain our object. Like a child dissatisfied with its dolls, our heart cries, "Not this, not this." But what is that other? Where is the further shore?

Is it something else than what we have? Is it somewhere else than where we are? Is it to take rest from all our works, to be relieved from all the responsibilities of life?

No, in the very heart of our activities we are seeking for our end. We are crying for the across, even where we stand. So, while our lips utter their prayer to be carried away, our busy hands are never idle.

In truth, thou ocean of joy, this shore and the other shore are one and the same in thee. When I call this my own, the other lies estranged; and missing the sense of that completeness which is in me, my heart incessantly cries out for the other. All my this, and that other, are waiting to be completely reconciled in thy love.

This "I" of mine toils hard, day and night, for a home which it knows as its own. Alas, there will be no end of its sufferings so long as it is not able to call this home thine. Till then it will struggle on, and its heart will ever cry, "Ferryman, lead me across." When this home of mine is made thine, that very moment is it taken across, even while its old walls enclose it. This "I" is restless. It is working for a gain which can never be assimilated with its spirit,

which it never can hold and retain. In its efforts to clasp in its own arms that which is for all, it hurts others and is hurt in its turn, and cries, "Lead me across". But as soon as it is able to say, "All my work is thine," everything remains the same, only it is taken across.

Where can I meet thee unless in this mine home made thine? Where can I join thee unless in this my work transformed into thy work? If I leave my home I shall not reach thy home; if I cease my work I can never join thee in thy work. For thou dwellest in me and I in thee. Thou without me or I without thee are nothing.

Therefore, in the midst of our home and our work, the prayer rises, "Lead me across!" For here rolls the sea, and even here lies the other shore waiting to be reached--yes, here is this everlasting present, not distant, not anywhere else.

Footnotes

55 Īçhāvāsyamdiam sarvam yat kincha jagatyānjagat.

56 Tēna tyaktēna bhunjīţhā mā gŗidhah kasyasviddhanam.

57 Ko hyevānyāt kah prānyāt yadesha ākāçha ānando na syāt.

58 Nāham manye suvedeti no na vedeti vedacha.

59 Yato vācho nivartante aprāpya manasā saha ānandam brahmaņo vidvān na vibheti kutaçchana.

60 Satyam jñānam anantam brahma yo veda nihitam guhāyām paramo vyoman so'çnute sarvān kāmān saha brahmaņa vipasçhite.

61 Yadetat hŗidayam mama tadastu hŗidayan tava.

62 Eshāsya paramā gatih

63 Eshāsya paramā sampat.

64 Eshāsya paramo lokah

65 Eshāsya parama ānandah

66 Daurbhikshāt yāti daurbhiksham kleçāt kleçam bhayāt bhayam.

"The language of eternal silence."

13

LISTEN, my heart, to the whispers of the world with which it makes love to you.

14

THE mystery of creation is like the darkness of night it is great. Delusions of knowledge are like the fog of the morning.

15

DO not seat your love upon a precipice because it is high.

16

I SIT at my window this morning where the world like a passer−by stops for a moment, nods to me and goes.

17

THESE little thoughts are the rustle of leaves; they have their whisper of joy in my mind.

18

WHAT you are you do not see, what you see is your shadow.

19

MY wishes are fools, they shout across thy songs, my Master.

Let me but listen.

20

I CANNOT choose the best.

The best chooses me.

21

THEY throw their shadows before them who carry their lantern on their back.

22

THAT I exist is a perpetual surprise which is life.

23

"WE, the rustling leaves, have a voice that answers the storms, but who are you so silent?"

"I am a mere flower."

24

REST belongs to the work as the eyelids to the eyes.

25

MAN is a born child, his power is the power of growth.

26

GOD expects answers for the flowers he sends us, not for the sun and the earth.

27

THE light that plays, like a naked child, among the green leaves happily knows not that man can lie.

28

O BEAUTY, find thyself in love, not in the flattery of thy mirror.

29

MY heart beats her waves at the shore of the world and writes upon it her signature in tears with the words, "I love thee."

30

"MOON, for what do you wait?"

"To salute the sun for whom I must make way."

31

THE trees come up to my window like the yearning voice of the dumb earth.

32

HIS own mornings are new surprises to God.

33

LIFE finds its wealth by the claims of the world, and its worth by the claims of love.

34

THE dry river−bed finds no thanks for its past.

35

THE bird wishes it were a cloud. The cloud wishes it were a bird.

36

THE waterfall sings, "I find my song, when I find my freedom."

37

I CANNOT tell why this heart languishes in silence.

It is for small needs it never asks, or knows or remembers.

38

WOMAN, when you move about in your household service your limbs sing like a hill stream among its pebbles.

39

THE sun goes to cross the Western sea, leaving its last salutation to the East.

40

DO not blame your food because you have no appetite.

41

THE trees, like the longings of the earth, stand a−tiptoe to peep at the heaven.

42

YOU smiled and talked to me of nothing and I felt that for this I had been waiting long.

43

THE fish in the water is silent, the animal on the earth is noisy, the bird in the air is singing,

But Man has in him the silence of the sea, the noise of the earth and the music of the air.

44

THE world rushes on over the strings of the lingering heart making the music of sadness.

45

HE has made his weapons his gods. When his weapons win he is defeated himself.

46

GOD finds himself by creating.

47

SHADOW, with her veil drawn, follows Light in secret meekness, with her silent steps of love.

48

THE stars are not afraid to appear like fireflies.

49

I THANK thee that I am none of the wheels of power but I am one with the living creatures that are crushed by it.

50

THE mind, sharp but not broad, sticks at every point but does not move.

51

YOUR idol is shattered in the dust to prove that God's dust is greater than your idol.

52

MAN does not reveal himself in his history, he struggles up through it.

53

WHILE the glass lamp rebukes the earthen for calling it cousin, the moon rises, and the glass lamp, with a bland smile, calls her, "My dear, dear sister."

54

LIKE the meeting of the seagulls and the waves we meet and come near. The seagulls fly off, the waves roll away and we depart.

55

MY day is done, and I am like a boat drawn on the beach, listening to the dance−music of the tide in the evening.

56

LIFE is given to us, we earn it by giving it.

57

WE come nearest to the great when we are great in humility.

58

THE sparrow is sorry for the peacock at the burden of its tail.

59

NEVER be afraid of the moments thus sings the voice of the everlasting.

60

THE hurricane seeks the shortest road by the no−road, and suddenly ends its search in the Nowhere.

61

TAKE my wine in my own cup, friend.

It loses its wreath of foam when poured into that of others.

62

THE Perfect decks itself in beauty for the love of the Imperfect.

63

GOD says to man, "I heal you therefore I hurt, love you therefore punish."

64

THANK the flame for its light, but do not forget the lampholder standing in the shade with constancy of patience.

65

TINY grass, your steps are small, but you possess the earth under your tread.

66

THE infant flower opens its bud and cries, "Dear World, please do not fade."

67

GOD grows weary of great kingdoms, but never of little flowers.

68

WRONG cannot afford defeat but Right can.

69

"I GIVE my whole water in joy," sings the waterfall, "though little of it is enough for the thirsty."

70

WHERE is the fountain that throws up these flowers in a ceaseless outbreak of ecstasy?

71

THE woodcutter's axe begged for its handle from the tree.

The tree gave it.

72

IN my solitude of heart I feel the sigh of this widowed evening veiled with mist and rain.

73

CHASTITY is a wealth that comes from abundance of love.

74

THE mist, like love, plays upon the heart of the hills and brings out surprises of beauty.

75

WE read the world wrong and say that it deceives us.

76

THE poet wind is out over the sea and the forest to seek his own voice.

77

EVERY child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man.

78

THE grass seeks her crowd in the earth.

The tree seeks his solitude of the sky.

79

MAN barricades against himself.

80

YOUR voice, my friend, wanders in my heart, like the muffled sound of the sea among these listening pines.

81

WHAT is this unseen flame of darkness whose sparks are the stars?

82

LET life be beautiful like summer flowers and death like autumn leaves.

88

HE who wants to do good knocks at the gate; he who loves finds the gate open.

84

IN death the many becomes one; in life the one becomes many.

Religion will be one when God is dead.

85

THE artist is the lover of Nature, therefore he is her slave and her master.

86

"HOW far are you from me, O Fruit?"

"I am hidden in your heart, O Flower."

87

THIS longing is for the one who is felt in the dark, but not seen in the day.

88

"YOU are the big drop of dew under the lotus leaf, I am the smaller one on its upper side," said the dewdrop to the lake.

89

THE scabbard is content to be dull when it protects the keenness of the sword.

90

IN darkness the One appears as uniform; in the light the One appears as manifold.

91

THE great earth makes herself hospitable with the help of the grass.

92

THE birth and death of the leaves are the rapid whirls of the eddy whose wider circles move slowly among stars.

93

POWER said to the world, "You are mine.

The world kept it prisoner on her throne.

Love said to the world, "I am thine."

The world gave it the freedom of her house.

94

THE mist is like the earth's desire. It hides the sun for whom she cries.

95

BE still, my heart, these great trees are prayers.

96

THE noise of the moment scoffs at the music of the Eternal.

97

I THINK of other ages that floated upon the stream of life and love and death and are forgotten, and I feel the freedom of passing away.

98

THE sadness of my soul is her bride's veil.

It waits to be lifted in the night.

99

DEATH'S stamp gives value to the coin of life; making it possible to buy with life what is truly precious.

100

THE cloud stood humbly in a corner of the sky.

The morning crowned it with splendour.

101

THE dust receives insult and in return offers her flowers.

102

DO not linger to gather flowers to keep them, but walk on, for flowers will keep themselves blooming all your way.

103

ROOTS are the branches down in the earth.

Branches are roots in the air.

104

THE music of the far−away summer flutters around the Autumn seeking its former nest.

105

DO not insult your friend by lending him merits from your own pocket.

106

THE touch of the nameless days clings to my heart like mosses round the old tree.

107

THE echo mocks her origin to prove she is the original.

108

GOD is ashamed when the prosperous boasts of His special favour.

109

I CAST my own shadow upon my path, because I have a lamp that has not been lighted.

110

MAN goes into the noisy crowd to drown his own clamour of silence.

111

THAT which ends in exhaustion is death, but the perfect ending is in the endless.

112

THE sun has his simple robe of light. The clouds are decked with gorgeousness.

113

THE hills are like shouts of children who raise their arms, trying to catch stars.

114

THE road is lonely in its crowd for it is not loved.

115

THE power that boasts of its mischiefs is laughed at by the yellow leaves that fall, and clouds that pass by.

116

THE earth hums to me to−day in the sun, like a woman at her spinng, some ballad of the ancient time in a forgotten tongue.

117

THE grass−blade is worth of the great world where it grows.

118

DREAM is a wife who must talk.

Sleep is a husband who silently suffers.

119

THE night kisses the fading day whispering to his ear, "I am death, your mother. I am to give you fresh birth."

120

I FEEL, thy beauty, dark night, like that of the loved woman when she has put out the lamp.

121

I CARRY in my world that flourishes the worlds that have failed.

122

DEAR friend, I feel the silence of your great thoughts of may a deepening eventide on this beach when I listen to these waves.

123

THE bird thinks it is an act of kindness to give the fish a lift in the air.

124

"IN the moon thou sendest thy love letters to me," said the night to the sun.

"I leave my answers in tears upon the grass."

125

THE Great is a born child; when he dies he gives his great childhood to the world.

126

NOT hammerstrokes, but dance of the water sings the pebbles into perfection.

127

BEES sip honey from flowers and hum their thanks when they leave.

The gaudy butterfly is sure that the flowers owe thanks to him.

128

TO be outspoken is easy when you do not wait to speak the complete truth.

129

ASKS the Possible to the Impossible, "Where is your dwelling place?"

"In the dreams of the impotent," comes the answer.

130

IF you shut your door to all errors truth will be shut out.

131

I HEAR some rustle of things behind my sadness of heart, I cannot see them.

132

LEISURE in its activity is work.

The stillness of the sea stirs in waves.

133

THE leaf becomes flower when it loves.

The flower becomes fruit when it worships.

134

THE roots below the earth claim no rewards for making the branches fruitful.

135

THIS rainy evening the wind is restless.

I look at the swaying branches and ponder over the greatness of all things.

136

STORM of midnight, like a giant child awakened in the untimely dark, has begun to play and shout.

137

THOU raisest thy waves vainly to follow thy lover. O sea, thou lonely bride of the storm.

138

"I AM ashamed of my emptiness," said the Word to the Work.

"I know how poor I am when I see you," said the Work to the Word.

139

TIME is the wealth of change, but the clock in its parody makes it mere change and no wealth.

140

TRUTH in her dress finds facts too tight.

In fiction she moves with ease.

141

WHEN I travelled to here and to there, I was tired of thee, O Road, but now when thou leadest me to everywhere I am wedded to thee in love.

142

LET me think that there is one among those stars that guides my life through the dark unknown.

143

WOMAN, with the grace of your fingers you touched my things and order came out like music.

144

ONE sad voice has its nest among the ruins of the years.

It sings to me in the night, "I loved you."

145

THE flaming fire warns me off by its own glow.

Save me from the dying embers hidden under ashes.

146

I HAVE my stars in the sky,

But oh for my little lamp unlit in my house.

147

THE dust of the dead words clings to thee.

Wash thy soul with silence.

148

GAPS are left in life through which comes the sad music of death.

149

THE world has opened its heart of light in the morning.

Come out, my heart, with thy love to meet it.

150

MY thoughts shimmer with these shimmering leaves and my heart sings with the touch of this sunlight; my life is glad to be floating with all things into the blue of space, into the dark of time.

151

GOD'S great power is in the gentle breeze, not in the storm.

152

THIS is a dream in which things are all loose and they oppress. I shall find them gathered in thee when I awake and shall be free.

153

"WHO is there to take up my duties?" asked the setting sun.

"I shall do what I can, my Master," said the earthen lamp.

154

BY plucking her petals you do not gather the beauty of the flower.

155

SILENCE will carry your voice like the nest that holds the sleeping birds.

156

THE Great walks with the Small without fear.

The Middling keeps aloof.

157

THE night opens the flowers in secret and allows the day to get thanks.

158

POWER takes as ingratitude the writhings of its victims.

159

WHEN we rejoice in our fulness, then we can part with our fruits with joy.

160

THE raindrops kissed the earth and whispered, "We are thy homesick children, mother, come back to thee from the heaven."

161

THE cobweb pretends to catch dew−drops and catches flies.

162

LOVE! when you come with the burning lamp of pain in your hand, I can see your face and know you as bliss.

163

"THE learned say that your lights will one day be no more." said the firefly to the stars.

The stars made no answer.

164

IN the dusk of the evening the bird of some early dawn comes to the nest of my silence.

165

THOUGHTS pass in my mind like flocks of ducks in the sky.

I hear the voice of their wings.

166

THE canal loves to think that rivers exist solely to supply it with water.

167

THE world has kissed my soul with its pain, asking for its return in songs.

168

THAT which oppresses me, is it my soul trying to come out in the open, or the soul of the world knocking at my heart for its entrance?

169

THOUGHT feeds itself with its own words and grows.

170

I HAVE dipped the vessel of my heart into this silent hour; it has filled with love.

171

EITHER you have work or you have not.

When you have to say, "Let us do something," then begins mischief.

172

THE sunflower blushed to own the nameless flower as her kin.

The sun rose and smiled on it, saying, "Are you well, my darling?"

173

"WHO drives me forward like fate?"

"The Myself striding on my back."

174

THE clouds fill the watercups of the river, hiding themselves in the distant hills.

175

I SPILL water from my water jar as I walk on my way,

Very little remains for my home.

176

THE water in a vessel is sparkling; the water in the sea is dark.

The small truth has words that are clear; the great truth has great silence.

177

YOUR smile was the flowers of your own fields, your talk was the rustle of your own mountain pines, but your heart was the woman that we all know.

178

IT is the little things that I leave behind for my loved ones, great things are for everyone.

179

WOMAN, thou hast encircled the world's heart with the depth of thy tears as the sea has the earth.

180

THE sunshine greets me with a smile. The rain, his sad sister, talks to my heart.

181

MY flower of the day dropped its petals forgotten.

In the evening it ripens into a golden fruit of memory.

182

I AM like the road in the night listening to the footfalls of its memories in silence.

183

THE evening sky to me is like a window, and a lighted lamp, and a waiting behind it.

184

HE who is too busy doing good finds no time to be good.

185

I AM the autumn cloud, empty of rain, see my fulness in the field of ripened rice.

186

THEY hated and killed and men praised them.

But God in shame hastens to hide its memory under the green grass.

187

TOES are the fingers that have forsaken their past.

188

DARKNESS travels towards light, but blindness towards death.

189

THE pet dog suspects the universe for scheming to take its place.

190

SIT still my heart, do not raise your dust.

Let the world find its way to you.

191

THE bow whispers to the arrow before it speeds forth "Your freedom is mine."

192

WOMAN, in your laughter you have the music of the fountain of life.

193

A MIND all logic is like a knife all blade.

It makes the hand bleed that uses it.

194

GOD loves man's lamp lights better than his own great stars.

195

THIS world is the world of wild storms kept tame with the music of beauty.

196

"MY heart is like the golden casket of thy kiss," said the sunset cloud to the sun.

197

BY touching you may kill, by keeping away you may possess.

198

THE cricket's chirp and the patter of rain come to me through the dark, like the rustle of dreams from my past youth.

199

"I HAVE lost my dewdrop," cries the flower to the morning sky that has lost all its stars.

200

THE burning log bursts in flame and cries, "This is my flower, my death."

201

THE wasp thinks that the honey−hive of the neighbouring bees is too small.

His neighbours ask him to build one still smaller.

202

"I CANNOT keep your waves," says the bank to the river.

"Let me keep your footprints in my heart."

203

THE day, with the noise of this little earth, drowns the silence of all worlds.

204

THE song feels the infinite in the air, the picture in the earth, the poem in the air and the earth;

For its words have meaning that walks and music that soars.

205

WHEN the sun goes down to the West, the East of his morning stands before him in silence.

206

LET me not put myself wrongly to my world and set it against me.

207

PRAISE shames me, for I secretly beg for it.

208

LET my doing nothing when I have nothing to do become untroubled in its depth of peace like the evening in the seashore when the water is silent.

209

MAIDEN, your simplicity, like the blueness of the lake, reveals your depth of truth.

210

THE best does not come alone. It comes with the company of the all.

211

GOD's right hand is gentle, but terrible is his left hand.

212

MY evening came among the alien trees and spoke in a language which my morning stars did not know.

213

NIGHT'S darkness is a bag that bursts with the gold of the dawn.

214

OUR desire lends the colours of the rainbow to the mere mists and vapours of life.

215

GOD waits to win back his own flowers as gifts from man's hands.

216

MY sad thoughts tease me asking me their own names.

217

THE service of the fruit is precious, the service of the flower is sweet, but let my service be the service of the leaves in its shade of humble devotion.

218

MY heart has spread its sails to the idle winds for the shadowy island of Anywhere.

219

MEN are cruel, but Man is kind.

220

MAKE me thy cup and let my fulness be for thee and for thine.

221

THE storm is like the cry of some god in pain whose love the earth refuses.

222

THE world does not leak because death is not a crack.

223

LIFE has become richer by the love that has been lost.

224

MY friend, your great heart shone with the sunrise of the East like the snowy summit of a lonely hill in the dawn.

225

THE fountain of death makes the still water of life play.

226

THOSE who have everything but thee, my God, laugh at those who have nothing but thyself.

227

THE movement of life has its rest in its own music.

228

KICKS only raise dust and not crops from the earth.

229

OUR names are the light that glows on the sea waves at night and then dies without leaving its signature.

230

LET him only see the thorns who has eyes to see the rose.

231

SET bird's wings with gold and it will never again soar in the sky.

232

THE same lotus of our clime blooms here in the alien water with the same sweetness, under another name.

233

IN heart's perspective the distance looms large.

234

THE moon has her light all over the sky, her dark spots to herself.

235

DO not say, "It is morning," and dismiss it with a name of yesterday. See it for the first time as a new−born child that has no name.

236

SMOKE boasts to the sky, and Ashes to the earth, that they are brothers to the fire.

237

THE raindrop whispered to the jasmine, "Keep me in your heart for ever."

The jasmine sighed, "Alas," and dropped to the ground.

238

TIMID thoughts, do not be afraid of me.

I am a poet.

239

THE dim silence of my mind seems filled with crickets' chirp the grey twilight of sound.

240

ROCKETS, your insult to the stars follows yourself back to the earth.

241

THOU hast led me through my crowded travels of the day to my evening's loneliness.

I wait for its meaning through the stillness of the night.

242

THIS life is the crossing of a sea, where we meet in the same narrow ship.

In death we reach the shore and go to our different worlds.

243

THE stream of truth flows through its channels of mistakes.

244

MY heart is homesick to−day for the one sweet hour across the sea of time.

245

THE bird−song is the echo of the morning light back from the earth.

246

"ARE you too proud to kiss me?" the morning light asks the buttercup.

247

"HOW may I sing to thee and worship, O Sun?" asked the little flower.

"By the simple silence of thy purity," answered the sun.

248

MAN is worse than an animal when he is an animal.

249

DARK clouds become heaven's flowers when kissed by light.

250

LET not the sword−blade mock its handle for being blunt.

251

THE night's silence, like a deep lamp, is burning with the light of its milky way.

252

AROUND the sunny island of Life swells day and night death's limitless song of the sea.

253

IS not this mountain like a flower, with its petals of hills, drinking the sunlight?

254

THE real with its meaning read wrong and emphasis misplaced is the unreal.

255

FIND your beauty, my heart, from the world's movement, like the boat that has the grace of the wind and the water.

256

THE eyes are not proud of their sight but of their eyeglasses.

257

I LIVE in this little world of mine and am afraid to make it the least less. Lift me into thy world and let me have the freedom gladly to lose my all.

258

THE false can never grow into truth by growing in power.

259

MY heart, with its lapping waves of song, longs to caress this green world of the sunny day.

260

WAYSIDE grass, love the star, then your dreams will come out in flowers.

261

LET your music, like a sword, pierce the noise of the market to its heart.

262

THE trembling leaves of this tree touch my heart like the fingers of an infant child.

263

THIS sadness of my soul is her bride's veil.

It waits to be lifted in the night.

264

THE little flower lies in the dust.

It sought the path of the butterfly.

265

I AM in the world of the roads. The night comes. Open thy gate, thou world of the home.

266

I HAVE sung the songs of thy day. In the evening let me carry thy lamp through the stormy path.

267

I DO not ask thee into the house.

Come into my infinite loneliness, my Lover.

268

DEATH belongs to life as birth does. The walk is in the raising of the foot as in the laying of it down.

269

I HAVE learnt the simple meaning of thy whispers in flowers and sunshine teach me to know thy words in pain and death.

270

THE night's flower was late when the morning kissed her, she shivered and sighed and dropped to the ground.

271

THROUGH the sadness of all things I hear the crooning of the Eternal Mother.

272

I CAME to your shore as a stranger, I lived in your house as a guest, I leave your door as a friend, my earth.

273

LET my thoughts come to you, when I am gone, like the afterglow of sunset at the margin of starry silence.

274

LIGHT in my heart the evening star of rest and then let the night whisper to me of love.

275

I AM a child in the dark.

I stretch my hands through the coverlet of night for thee, Mother.

276

THE day of work is done. Hide my face in your arms, Mother.

Let me dream.

277

THE lamp of meeting burns long; it goes out in a moment at the parting.

278

ONE word keep for me in thy silence, O World, when I am dead, "I have loved."

279

WE live in this world when we love it.

280

LET the dead have the immortality of fame, but the living the immortality of love.

281

I HAVE seen thee as the half−awakened child sees his mother in the dusk of the dawn and then smiles and sleeps again.

282

I SHALL die again and again to know that life is inexhaustible.

283

WHILE I was passing with the crowd in the road I saw thy smile from the balcony and I sang and forgot all noise.

284

LOVE is life in its fulness like the cup with its wine.

285

THEY light their own lamps and sing their own words in their temples.

But the birds sing thy name in thine own morning light, for thy name is joy.

286

LEAD me in the centre of thy silence to fill my heart with songs.

287

LET them live who choose in their own hissing world of fireworks.

My heart longs for thy stars, my God.

288

LOVE'S pain sang round my life like the unplumbed sea, and love's joy sang like birds in its flowering groves.

289

PUT out the lamp when thou wishest.

I shall know thy darkness and shall love it.

290

WHEN I stand before thee at the day's end thou shalt see my scars and know that I had my wounds and also my healing.

291

SOME day I shall sing to thee in the sunrise of some other world, "I have seen thee before in the light of the earth, in the love of man."

292

CLOUDS come floating into my life from other days no longer to shed rain or usher storm but to give colour to my sunset sky.

293

TRUTH raises against itself the storm that scatters its seeds broadcast.

294

THE storm of the last night has crowned this morning with golden peace.

295

TRUTH seems to come with its final word; and the final word gives birth to its next.

296

BLESSED is he whose fame does not outshine his truth.

297

SWEETNESS of thy name fills my heart when I forget mine like thy morning sun when the mist is melted.

298

THE silent night has the beauty of the mother and the clamorous day of the child.

299

THE world loved man when he smiled. The world became afraid of him when he laughed.

300

GOD waits for man to regain his childhood in wisdom.

301

LET me feel this world as thy love taking form, then my love will help it.

302

THY sunshine smiles upon the winter days of my heart, never doubting of its spring flowers.

303

GOD kisses the finite in his love and man the infinite.

304

THOU crossest desert lands of barren years to reach the moment of fulfilment.

305

GOD's silence ripens man's thoughts into speech.

306

THOU wilt find, Eternal Traveller, marks of thy footsteps across my songs.

307

LET me not shame thee, Father, who displayest thy glory in thy children.

308

CHEERLESS is the day, the light under frowning clouds is like a punished child with traces of tears on its pale cheeks, and the cry of the wind is like the cry of a wounded world. But I know I am travelling to meet my Friend.

309

TO−NIGHT there is a stir among the palm leaves, a swell in the sea, Full Moon, like the heart throb of the world. From what unknown sky hast thou carried in thy silence the aching secret of love?

310

I DREAM of a star, an island of light, where I shall be born and in the depth of its quickening leisure my life will ripen its works like the ricefield in the autumn sun.

311

THE smell of the wet earth in the rain rises like a great chant of praise from the voiceless multitude of the insignificant.

312

THAT love can ever lose is a fact that we cannot accept as truth.

313

WE shall know some day that death can never rob us of that which our soul has gained, for her gains are one with herself.

314

GOD comes to me in the dusk of my evening with the flowers from my past kept fresh in his basket.

315

WHEN all the strings of my life will be tuned, my Master, then at every touch of thine will come out the music of love.

316

LET me live truly, my Lord, so that death to me become true.

317

MAN'S history is waiting in patience for the triumph of the insulted man.

318

I FEEL thy gaze upon my heart this moment like the sunny silence of the morning upon the lonely field whose harvest is over.

319

I LONG for the Island of Songs across this heaving Sea of Shouts.

320

THE prelude of the night is commenced in the music of the sunset, in its solemn hymn to the ineffable dark.

321

I HAVE scaled the peak and found no shelter in fame's bleak and barren height. Lead me, my Guide, before the light fades, into the valley of quiet where life's harvest mellows into golden wisdom.

322

THINGS look phantastic in this dimness of the dusk the spires whose bases are lost in the dark and tree tops like blots of ink. I shall wait for the morning and wake up to see thy city in the light.

323

I HAVE suffered and despaired and known death and I am glad that I am in this great world.

324

THERE are tracts in my life that are bare and silent. They are the open spaces where my busy days had their light and air.

325

RELEASE me from my unfulfilled past clinging to me from behind making death difficult.

326

LET this be my last word, that I trust in thy love.